

10¢ PER COPY SATURDAY MARCH 24 BY THE YEAR \$4.00

ALL-STORY WEEKLY



George Prentiss

The Night of Secrets
by Sidney Warwick

Swear Off Tobacco



Tobacco Habit Banished In 48 to 72 Hours

Immediate Results

Trying to quit the tobacco habit unaided is a losing fight against heavy odds, and means a serious shock to your nervous system. So don't try it! Make the tobacco habit quit you. It will quit you if you will just take **Tobacco Redeemer** according to directions.

It doesn't make a particle of difference whether you've been a user of tobacco for a single month or 50 years, or how much you use, or in what form you use it. Whether you smoke cigars, cigarettes, pipe, chew plug or fine cut or use snuff—**Tobacco Redeemer** will positively remove all craving for tobacco in any form in from 48 to 72 hours. Your tobacco craving will begin to decrease after the very first dose—there's no long waiting for results.

Tobacco Redeemer contains no habit-forming drugs of any kind and is the most marvelously quick, absolutely scientific and thoroughly reliable remedy for the tobacco habit.

Not a Substitute

Tobacco Redeemer is in no sense a substitute for tobacco, but is a radical, efficient treatment. After finishing the treatment you have absolutely no desire to use tobacco again or to continue the use of the remedy. It quiets the nerves, and will make you feel better in every way. If you really want to quit the tobacco habit—get rid of it so completely that when you see others using it, it will not awaken the slightest desire in you—you should at once begin a course of **Tobacco Redeemer** treatment for the habit.

Results Absolutely Guaranteed

A single trial will convince the most skeptical. Our legal, binding, money-back guarantee goes with each full treatment. If **Tobacco Redeemer** fails to banish the tobacco habit when taken according to the plain and easy directions, your money will be cheerfully refunded upon demand.

Let Us Send You Convincing Proof

If you're a slave of the tobacco habit and want to find a sure, quick way of quitting "for keeps," you owe it to yourself and to your family to mail the coupon below or send your name and address on a postal and receive our free booklet on the deadly effect of tobacco on the human system, and positive proof that **Tobacco Redeemer** will quickly free you from the habit.

Newell Pharmacal Company
Dept. 320 St. Louis, Mo.



Free Book Coupon

NEWELL PHARMACAL CO.,
Dept. 320 St. Louis, Mo.

Please send, without obligating me in any way, your free booklet regarding the tobacco habit and proof that **Tobacco Redeemer** will positively free me from the tobacco habit.

Name.....

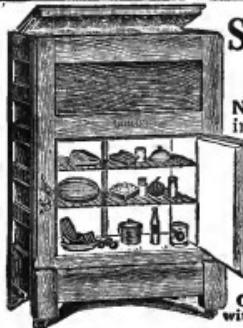
Street and No.

Town..... State.....

3 Wonderful Bargains

From the Great UNIVERSAL Catalog
— Each Sent Direct Only

50¢



Sensational Sale on Refrigerators

No. U120. A remarkable value in Universal Sanitary White Enamel Lined Refrigerator. Lift lid design. Made of genuine ash, rich golden finish, solid brass trimmings. Has two nickel wire shelves. Ice rack of galvanized steel bars welded together. Ice compartment 50 lbs. capacity. Stands 42 in. high, 23½ in. wide and 15½ in. deep. Provision compartment measures 19¾ x 14¾ x 11½ inch. Has siphon drip cup. Special handle allows for padlock. Order by No. U120. Price \$12.68. 50¢ with order; Balance \$1.25 per month.

Collapsible Go-Cart

Here is a splendid value in a high wood side, full collapsible Go-Cart. Body made of 3-ply veneers, securely held by tinned ferrules; neatly enamelled and trimmed with gold stripes. Has full tubular pushers, nickel trimmed handle, sensitive spring, positive foot brake, padded seat, 3-position back, adjustable 3-hole hood, nickel hub caps and many other features found only on higher priced Go-Carts. Has 10 inch wheels, ½ inch solid rubber tires, 16x28 in. frame, back 11½ x 15 inches, seat 10x13 inches.

Mercely mail the coupon and 50¢ and Go-Cart will be sent immediately. If, after 30 days use, you decide that you do not wish to keep it, return it at our expense and your money will be refunded.

Order by No. U133. Price only \$10.65. Terms: 50¢ with order; Balance \$1.05 per month.

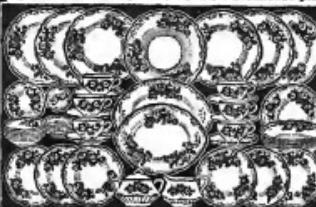
Remarkable Sale of Dishes

48-Piece Floral Design Dinner Set. Complete for Family of Six.

Beautiful Complete 48-Piece Dining Set, made of good quality pure white Porcelain, exquisitely decorated with latest rose floral pattern in many natural colors and gold. Six dinner plates, 9¾ in.; 6 breakfast plates, 7¾ in.; 6 cups, 6 saucers, 6 fruit cups, 6 bowls, 6 meat plates, 6 new style deep soup bowls, 6 new style deep vegetable dishes, 1 meat platter, 11¾ in.; 1 meat platter, 9¾ in.; 1 sugar bowl and cover (2 pieces); 1 creamer and sugar. Every piece guaranteed full size for family use.

This 48-Piece Set is a wonderful value at our low price and easy terms.

Order by No. U127. Price only \$3.69. Terms: 50¢ with order; Balance 50¢ per month.



Order One of These Special Bargains

Here is a plan for beautifying the home that marks the most advanced step ever taken in the history of merchandising. For only 50¢ we will send you any of the remarkable bargains shown on this page. If more than one is wanted send 50¢ for each item. You may use what you order for 30 days at our risk. If you then decide to keep it, pay the balance in small monthly payments. If you decide not to keep it return it at our expense and we will return your 50¢—the 30 days use of the goods costs you nothing.

This small 50¢ deposit does not obligate you in any way, but is merely asked as an indication of good faith and to protect ourselves against irresponsible people ordering at random. You run absolutely no risk in sending in your order. Ours is a big, successful firm that is reputable, responsible and trustworthy in every way. And every article you order from us comes with a special binding guarantee which insures your absolute satisfaction. Send us your order today—only 50¢ and coupon for each article desired.

SPECIAL BARGAIN BOOK FREE!

Send for Special Bargain Book picturing and describing everything for the home—at rock-bottom prices—and on the most wonderfully liberal terms imaginable. We will trust you for anything you want on our liberal, easy-to-pay, credit plan.

UNIVERSAL MAIL ORDER CO.



145-153 W. 39th St.
Dept. 303
Chicago

If only catalog is wanted put an X in this square, fill in name and address on lines below and mail coupon.

Universal Mail Order Co. 145-153 W. 39th St., Dept. 303 Chicago

Gentlemen: Enclosed find 50¢ for each item marked below. If unsatisfactory after 30 days examination I agree to pay the balance. Prices and terms printed in this advertisement. If not satisfied I will return goods to you.

U120—Refrigerator
U133—Collapsible Go-Cart
U127—48-Piece Dinner Set.

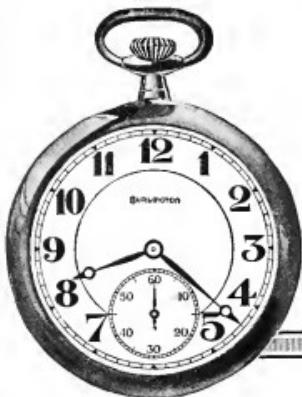
Name.....

Address.....

City..... State.....

NOTE—Put line like this — in front of items wanted.

Special Introductory Offer!—



The new Burlington—just out—distributed now for the first time—and on an astounding offer. The superb new model far surpassing everything of the past. 21 jewels, adjusted to positions, temperature and isochronism. New thin design—and all the newest ideas in gold strata cases to choose from. Send coupon today for full particulars.

And—we will send you this master watch without a cent down. If you decide to buy it—you pay *only* the rock-bottom price—the same price that even wholesale jewelers must pay.

\$250 a Month!

Just think of it!
\$2.50 a month—less than ten cents a day will pay, at the rock-bottom price, for the New 21-Jewel Burlington—the master watch. This perfect time-piece will be sent to you, prepaid, without a cent deposit so that you can see and examine it for yourself. When you hold it in your hand you will realize what a gigantic value it is—and you will know how the Burlington brought the highest watch value within the reach of all.

**21
Jewels**

—adjusted to positions
—adjusted to temperature
—adjusted to isochronism
—adjusted to the second.
Runs almost 2 days in one winding.
On an Iron-clad guarantee.

Newest

up-to-date ideas in gold strata cases—the master products of the goldsmith's art are illustrated in colors in our new Watch Book. All yours to choose from. Write for the new watch book now.

Burlington Watch Co.
19th St. and Marshall Blvd.
Dept. 9083, Chicago, Ill.

Please send me, without obligation (and prepaid), your free book on watches, with full explanation of your cash or \$2.50 a month offer on the Burlington Watch.

Name.....

Address.....

Catalog Now Off the Press

Write today for our new catalog. Read about this gigantic watch value. Learn about watch movements and why 21 jewels are the number prescribed by watch experts. Read what makes a watch movement perfect—and how the Burlington is adjusted to the second. The watch book is free. Write for it today and get posted on watches and watch values. Send the coupon.

Burlington Watch Co. Dept. 9083, 19th St. & Marshall Blvd., Chicago

ALL-STORY WEEKLY

VOL. LXIX

NUMBER 2



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THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY, 8 WEST FORTIETH STREET, NEW YORK, and TEMPLE HOUSE, TEMPLE AVENUE, E. C., LONDON

FRANK A. MUNSEY, President

RICHARD H. TITHEBRIDGE, Secretary

CHRISTOPHER H. HOPE, Treasurer

Single copies, 10 cents. By the year, \$4.00 in United States, its dependencies, Mexico and Cuba; \$6.00 to Canada, and \$7.00 to Foreign Countries. Remittances should be made by check, express money order or postal money order. Currency should not be sent unless registered.

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Classified Advertising

The Purpose of this Department

is to put the reader in touch immediately with the newest needs for the home, office, farm, or person; to offer, or seek, an unusual business opportunity, or to suggest a service that may be performed satisfactorily through correspondence. It will pay a housewife or business man equally well to read these advertisements carefully.

AGENTS & SALESMEN WANTED

WE WILL PAY GOOD COMMISSIONS to real live hustling agents to introduce our "The First" Cent Premium Furniture Polish to the consumers. Quick sales and repeat orders will build a large and profitable business for you. Premier Polish Mfg. Company, Box 66, Indianapolis, Indiana.

SWELL SUIT FREE FOR 2 HOURS' WORK. Show it to your friends and make \$5.00 an hour in your spare time. We show how. Costs nothing to try. Write quick for measure blank and our handy sample outfit. All Free. We deliver everything free. Look into this. Paragon Tailoring Co., Dept. 391, Chicago.

FREE SAMPLE WITH PARTICULARS. NO SPLASHING WATER STRAINERS. Easy seller. Returns big. Experience unnecessary. A. E. Union Filter Co., New York.

"**WASHWHITE**" Cleans Cloths Without Rubbing. Big profit on quick sales and repeat business. Valuable Premiums. Free samples. Exclusive territory. Unusual selling helps. Write for our offer. The Nacma Co., Dept. G-11, 20 W. Lake St., Chicago.

WE PAY \$80 MONTHLY SALARY and furnish rig and expenses to introduce guaranteed poultry and stock products. Bigler Company, X501, Springfield, Ill.

Armstrong Earned \$67.50 First Day selling our new business necessity. Retails \$5.00 to \$30.00. Agents profit 150%. Buyer satisfied or money back. No competition. Exclusive territory. Free Sample. Bayers Co., 421 W. Walnwright, St. Louis, Mo.

AGENTS—500% PROFIT. FREE SAMPLE GOLO AND Silver Sign Letters for store fronts and office windows. Anyone can put on. Big demand everywhere. Write today for liberal offer to agents. Metallic Letter Co., 441 N. Clark St., Chicago.

NEWEST MONEY MAKER! 11 PIECE TOILET SET selling like blazes at \$1 with \$1 earning set free. Tremendous Hit! Bandall sold 30 one day. Success sure. A. Piero Company, 906 Lake Street, Chicago.

BIG MONEY SELLING PHYSICAL CULTURE BOOK. Sample on receipt of 15c. We also have other books that are winners. Write for particulars. Charles Goldman & Co., 424 S. Dearborn Street, Chicago, Ill.

HELP WANTED

CIVIL SERVICE EXAMINATIONS open the way to good Government positions. I can coach you by mail at small cost. Full particulars free to any American citizen of eighteen or over. Write today for Booklet CE 1655, Earl Hopkins, Washington, D. C.

RAILWAY MAIL AND POSTAL CLERKS: EXAMINATIONS SOON. Prepare at home. Write for plan 301 of payment after appointment. Civil Service Dept., P. B. C., 1017 Chestnut St., Philadelphia, Pa.

MAN OR WOMAN TO TRAVEL FOR OLD-ESTABLISHED FIRM. No canvassing; \$1170 first year, payable weekly, pursuant to Contract. Expenses advanced. K. G. Nichols, Philadelphia, Pa.; Pepper Building.

NO STRIKE; 6 HOUR DAY. Men Everywhere. Firemen, Brakemen, Baggage men, \$120. Colored Porters, Experience unnecessary. 807 Railway Bureau, E. St. Louis, Ill.

MEN—BECOME GOVERNMENT RAILWAY MAIL CLERKS. \$75 to \$150 monthly. Every second week off with pay. Common sense education sufficient. Sample examination questions free. Write immediately. Franklin Institute, Dept. A3, Rochester, N. Y.

MACHINERY, TOOLS & SUPPLIES

CARPENTERS, MACHINISTS AND TOOLMAKERS. When you are in need of a tool case send for Keystone Portable Tool Case. Every case Guaranteed. Write for catalogue. Keystone Case Co., Dept. 100, 215 N. Keystone Ave., Chicago, Ill.

Classified Advertising Rates in

The Munsey Magazines

	Line Rate	Special Combination Line Rate
Munsey's Magazine	\$2.00	\$1.30
The Argosy50	.30
Railroad Man's Magazine50	.30
All-Story Weekly75	.45

\$4.85
April 21st All-Story Weekly Firms Close March 29th.

"*A New Face In Business*" is a booklet that tells how to advertise successfully in the Classified Department of the Munsey Magazines. Mailed anywhere on request.

PATENT ATTORNEYS

PATENTS THAT PROTECT AND PAY. ADVICE AND BOOKS FREE. Highest references. Best results. Promptness assured. Send sketch or model for search. Watson & Coleman, 624 F Street, Washington, D. C.

IDEAS WANTED. Manufacturers are writing for patents produced through me. Free books with list hundreds of inventions wanted sent free. I help you protect your invention. Advice Free. R. B. Owen, 69 Owen Building, Washington, D. C.

PATENT YOUR IDEAS—\$10,000 OFFERED for certain inventions. Books, "How to Obtain a Patent," "What to Invent, send free. Send rough sketch for free report as to patentability. Manufacturers constantly writing as for patents we have obtained. We advise you to patent for sale at our expense. Established 20 years. Address Chandler & Chandler, Patent Attorneys, 918 F Street, Washington, D. C.

PATENTS—WRITE FOR HOW TO OBTAIN A PATENT. Price of Patent Buyers, and Inventors. Wanted \$1,000,000 in prize offered for inventions. Send sketch for free opinion as to patentability. Our Free Book sent free report. Patents advertised Free. We assist inventors to sell their inventions. Victor J. Evans Co., Patent Atty., 762 Ninth, Washington, D. C.

"PRIZES FOR PATENTS." "MONEY IN PATENTS." "How to Get Your Patent and Money." "Why Some Inventors Fail." "Needed Inventions." Sent free. Send sketch for free opinion. Randolph & Co., 630 F Street, Washington, D. C.

INVENT SOMETHING: YOUR IDEAS MAY BRING WEALTH; our free book tells what to invent and how to obtain a patent through our new credit system; write to-day. Waters & Co., 4103 Warter Building, Washington, D. C.

BUSINESS OPPORTUNITIES

\$50 TO \$100 A DAY CAN BE EARNED with a Long Crispette Machine in any town. Machine a wonder. Makes taffetties—new delicious popcorn confection. Send 5¢ a package—almost is net profit. Everybody buys at light-weight roll in. All you need is one machine and good location. No experience necessary. Investment small. Returns large. Write once for free book "Dollars & Sense"—a valuable guide to wealth and independence—a start to the ownership of a store of your own. Don't wait. Send postal today. Addres W. Z. Long Co., 1334 High Street, Springfield, Ohio.

MAKE BIG MONEY! USE YOUR SPARE TIME TEACHING DANCING; lady's or gent's profession. Small investment, big profits. Be the first in your town. Act now. Catalog free. Prof. Bobt. H. Charles, Studio, 4722 Indians Ave., Chicago, Ill.

BUSINESS AND CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOLS

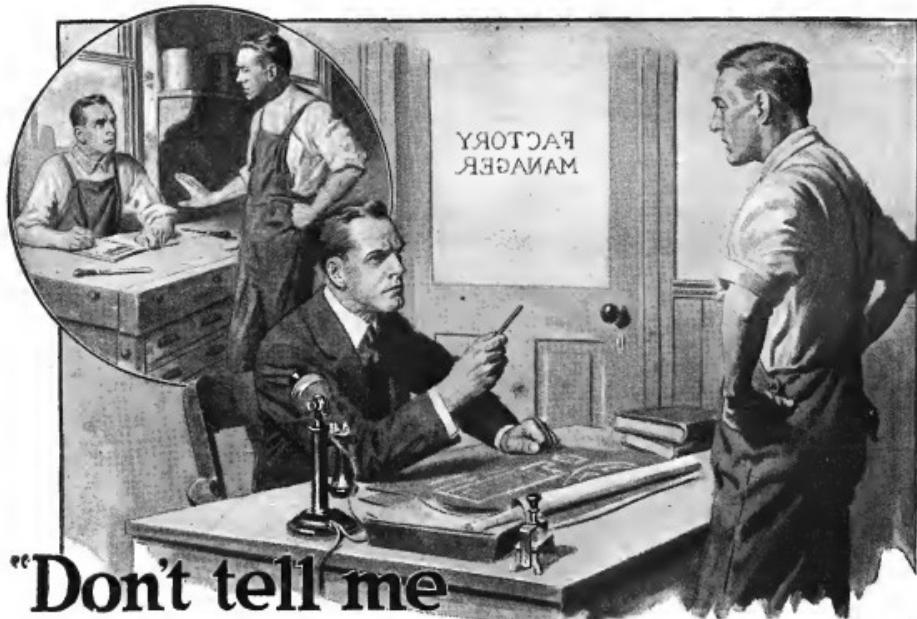
THE AMERICAN SCHOOL OF AVIATION ANNOUNCES A new correspondence course in aero-construction and design. A thorough training in aeronautical engineering. American School of Aviation, Dept. 2003, 451 South Dearborn Street, Chicago.

MOTION PICTURE PLAYS

PHOTOPLAYS WANTED BY 46 COMPANIES: \$10 TO \$500 EACH PHOTOPLAY. No correspondence course of experience-needed; details sent free to beginners. Sell your ideas. Producers League, 229 Wainwright, St. Louis, Mo.

AUTHORS—MANUSCRIPTS

STORIES, POEMS, PLAYS, ETC. ARE WANTED FOR PUBLICATION. Good ideas bring big money. Submit MSS. or write Literary Bureau, 110 Hannibal, Mo.



"Don't tell me you never had a chance!"

"Four years ago you and I worked at the same bench. We were *both* discontented. Remember the noon we saw the International Correspondence Schools' advertisement? That woke me up. I realized that to get ahead I needed special training, and I decided to let the I. C. S. help me. When I marked the coupon I asked you to sign with me. You said, 'Aw, forget it!'

"I made the most of my opportunity and have been climbing ever since. You had the same chance I had, but you turned it down. No, Jim, you can't expect more money until you've trained yourself to handle bigger work."

There are lots of "Jims" in the world—in stores, factories, offices, everywhere. Are *you* one of them? Wake up! Every time you see an I. C. S. coupon your chance is staring you in the face. Don't turn it down.

Right now over one hundred thousand men are preparing themselves for bigger jobs and better pay through I. C. S. courses.

You can join them and get in line for promotion. Mark and mail this coupon, and find out how.

INTERNATIONAL CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOLS
Box 2099, Scranton, Pa.

Reports on 27,000 typical I. C. S. students show 14,900 now receiving \$1500 a year or more; 2451 receiving \$2500 or more; 413 receiving \$5000 or more; 20 receiving \$10,000 or more; and eight with annual incomes of \$25,000 or more.

WHAT OTHERS HAVE DONE YOU CAN DO

TEAR OUT HERE

INTERNATIONAL CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOLS

Box 2099, SCRANTON, PA.

Explain, without obligating me, how I can qualify for the position, or in the subject, before which I mark X.

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> ELECTRICAL ENGINEER | <input type="checkbox"/> SALESMANSHIP |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Electric Lighting | <input type="checkbox"/> ADVERTISING MAN |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Electric Car Running | <input type="checkbox"/> Window Trimmer |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Electric Wiring | <input type="checkbox"/> Show Case Writer |
| <input type="checkbox"/> TELEGRAPH EXPERT | <input type="checkbox"/> RAILROADER |
| <input type="checkbox"/> MECHANICAL ENGINEER | <input type="checkbox"/> AUTOMOTOR |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Mechanical Draftsman | <input type="checkbox"/> DESIGNER |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Machine Shop Practice | <input type="checkbox"/> BOOKKEEPER |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Gas Engineer | <input type="checkbox"/> Stenographer and Typist |
| <input type="checkbox"/> CIVIL ENGINEER | <input type="checkbox"/> Cert. Public Accountant |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Surveying and Mapping | <input type="checkbox"/> RAILWAY ACCOUNTANT |
| <input type="checkbox"/> MINING ENGINEER | <input type="checkbox"/> CONSTRUCTION |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Metallurgist or Prospector | <input type="checkbox"/> GOOD ENGLISH |
| <input type="checkbox"/> STATIONARY ENGINEER | <input type="checkbox"/> Teacher |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Marine Engineer | <input type="checkbox"/> Common School Subjects |
| <input type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECT | <input type="checkbox"/> CIVIL SERVICE |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Contractor and Builder | <input type="checkbox"/> BUSINESS |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Architectural Draftsman | <input type="checkbox"/> MARKETING |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Concrete | <input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Structural Engineer | <input type="checkbox"/> Textile Overseer or Sup't |
| <input type="checkbox"/> PLUMBING AND HEATING | <input type="checkbox"/> Navigator |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Sheet Metal Worker | <input type="checkbox"/> Poultry Raising |
| <input type="checkbox"/> CHEMICAL ENGINEER | <input type="checkbox"/> AUTOMOBILES |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> Auto Repairing |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> Spanish |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> German |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> French |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> Italian |

Name _____

Occupation _____

& Employer _____

Street _____

and No. _____

City _____

State _____

GOOD READING

"THE VERDICT," - - -	By Edgar Saltus	"APPLES OF EDEN,"	By Du Vernet Rabell
"A FOREST TRAGEDY,"	By Samuel T. Dana	"DISCOVERIES AND INVENTIONS,"	By Brander Matthews
"SARAH BERNHARDT,"	By Charles Henry Meltzer	"THE CASTLES OF ENGLAND,"	By Richard Le Gallienne
"THE INNER DOOR," a serial	By Alan Sullivan	"SIX DAYS LATE,"	By John Fleming Wilson
"ONE ON THE LANDLADY,"	By Will Knight	"THE GIFT SUPREME," a serial	By George Allan England

Complete Novelette, "A PICTURE OF INNOCENCE," By Freeman Tilden
Another of William Slavens McNutt's human stories of American life, "THE GREAT CYCLE"

MUNSEY'S FOR APRIL

This issue also will contain an announcement by Mr. Munsey of great interest and importance to all readers of magazines.

BUY YOUR COPY TO-DAY
ONLY TEN CENTS
ON ALL
NEWS-STANDS



THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY
8 West Fortieth Street
NEW YORK

Mr. Edison's Wonderful Phonograph

Only **\$1.00**
After
Free Trial



Yes, you may keep this New Edison
—Thomas A. Edison's great phonograph with the
dust cover removed, for only
\$1. Pay the balance at rate of only a few cents a day. Try the New Edison
in your own home before you decide to buy. Send no money now. Enter-
tain your friends without expense. Then return it if you wish.

Write Today for Our New Edison Book. Send your name and
address for our new book and pictures of the new
Edison phonograph. No obligations—write now while this offer lasts.

P. F. BARSON, Edison Phonograph Distributor,
1083 Fulton Street, Chicago, Illinois

Cornet Free!

Give you a **Beautiful Cornet** or any Band
Instrument absolutely **FREE**. You pay weekly as
lessons are taken. Instrument is sent
with first lesson. Graduates in every
state. Hundreds of enthusiastic testi-
monials. Write to-day for our booklet
and wonderful tuition offer.

INTERNATIONAL CORNET SCHOOL, 654 Federal St., BOSTON, MASS.

Mailing Cards vs. Classified Advertising

It would cost more than \$11,500 to send a post-card to the more-than-a-million homes that read "The Munsey Magazines" every month. Advertisers who want to cover the same ground for \$18.00 are using this short cut.

WRITE FOR BOOKLET,

"A New Force in Business," that gives full particulars about the effectiveness of Classified Advertising in "The Munsey Magazines."

THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY
8 West Fortieth Street, New York



Delivered TO FREE

Your choice of 44 styles, colors and sizes in the famous line of "RANGER" bicycles, shown in full color in the big new Free Catalog. We pay all the freight charges from Chicago to your town.

30 Days Free Trial allowed on the bicycle you select, actual riding test in your own town for a full month. Do not buy until you get our great new trial offer and low Factory-Direct-To-Dealer terms, plus many others.

TIRES LAMPS, HORNS, pedais, single wheel and repair parts for all makes of bicycles at half usual prices. No one else can offer you such values at such terms.

SEND NO MONEY but write today for the big new Catalog. 47¢

MEAD CYCLE COMPANY
Dept. D-5, Chicago



Gray Hair and Safety

Mary T. Goldman's Gray Hair Color Restorer is the original preparation for safely and quickly restoring the natural color to gray, faded and bleached hair in a few days. Leaves the hair clean, fluffy and natural.

Free Trial Package and special comb. Test it on a lock of hair. This test will prove more than anything we could say in an advertisement. Write now and be sure to tell the original color before it turned gray. Was it black, dark brown, medium brown or light brown? Regular \$1.00 size at your druggist's or I will fill your order direct. Clever imitators, not being able to imitate the preparation itself, have copied our labels almost word for word. To be safe and sure, remember the name.

(112)
MARY T. GOLDMAN 459 Goldman Bldg., St. Paul, Minn.
Established 50 Years

Say Good-bye to Laundry Bills



CHALLENGE CLEANABLE COLLARS

Good looking, serviceable and offering a real economy. Stitched edge and dull linen effect. Better than merely "linen." Proof against the crocking velvet collar, rain, snow and perspiration.

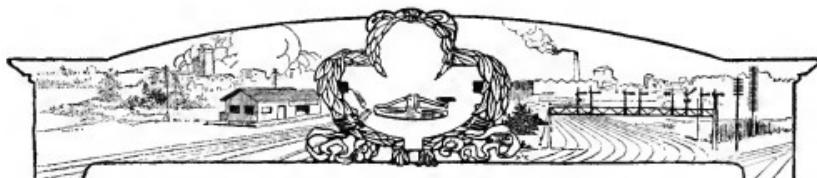
*Instantly cleanable—on or off—with
a bit of soap and a damp cloth.*

Every accepted style, half sizes. 25¢ each—at your dealer's or by mail. State your style and size.

Descriptive booklet on request.

THE ARLINGTON COMPANY
725 Broadway, New York





A Clear Track and a Fast Run For the APRIL **Railroad Man's Magazine**

"Ditching the Hobo"

How the railroads of the United States are fighting the damage and crimes of the 100,000 tramp army.

"At Mile-Post 104"

A complete novelette of railroad life.

By CHARLES W. TYLER

"Embalming Rights-of-Way"

An explanation of the methods by which modern science has succeeded in prolonging the life of railroad ties.

"Fifty Years from Now"

President Smith, of the New York Central, tells what our railroads will be like in fifty years.

Other Fiction, Fact and Fancy of the Rail

THE APRIL RAILROAD MAN
On All News-stands—Ten Cents

THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY

8 West Fortieth Street, New York



ALL-STORY WEEKLY

VOL LXIX

NUMBER 2



SATURDAY, MARCH 24, 1917



The Night of Secrets

by Sidney Warwick

THERE are circumstances under which a violation of the accepted laws of man—written and unwritten—are more than usually fascinating fiction material. And in this splendid five-part serial, a few of these circumstances are poignantly set forth to prove to you—and Leila Solwith—that wrong is wrong *all* of the time. There is mystery enough, too, in the story to keep you in a constant state of excitement.—THE EDITOR.

CHAPTER I.

THE YOUNGER GENERATION.

CURTIS said you wanted to see me, sir?"

At the sound of the voice James Mackenzie glanced up quickly from his desk and wheeled round in his chair. He had been so deep in some specifications that he had not heard the door open.

"That you, Jack? Come in. Yes, I wanted ten minutes with you—I might not have an opportunity to-night, with that masonic dinner on."

There was a curiously old-fashioned flavor about the chief's private room at the dock, with its two long windows look-

ing out over a stretch of gray, tossing Thames—so low-ceiled as to give an effect of added height to the newcomer's long-limbed athletic figure.

The models of wooden ships round the walls—that Jack Barclay remembered coveting as a boy—belonged to another age; the date affixed in tarnished gold figures to the most modern carried one back nearly half a century. All the originals had been built at "Mackenzie's"—but that was in the old days before the age of iron had drawn the building of ships away from the Thames-side yards to the Tyne and the Clyde.

But if the offices looked old-fashioned, the hum of ceaseless activity outside told another story. Mackenzie's had adapted

itself to changed requirements. New ships might be no longer built here, but old ships have from time to time to be hospitalized in dry dock; engines break down, boilers rust out, defective plates need to be replaced.

The incessant clang of the riveters' hammers was not a little distracting to some of the many callers with business to discuss. To Mackenzie himself this strident song of labor was so familiar that it was less disturbing than silence in the yard would have been.

Every one in "the ship-smelling East"—that tarry region stretching away on both sides of London River from the Tower to the Essex mud-flats—knew Mackenzie's Dock. The present owner was the third of his name since his grandfather built the dock; a man of sixty odd, with a rugged, rather masterful, face—a man more respected perhaps than liked. In calm moments James Mackenzie himself would admit to a hasty temper that often enough made his attitude unreasonable.

And his hot-headedness and irascibility had a way of obscuring his good points, which—as Jack Barclay at least knew—were many. Mackenzie had adopted him when the boy's father had died leaving him only a patrimony of debt. There was no tie of blood, no claim beyond that of old friendship—but Mackenzie had paid the dead man's debts, had taken the boy and brought him up as his own son.

"Jack, you'll be twenty-six in three weeks' time—two days after my return from New York, if I can catch the return-boat I hope," the older man said suddenly; and paused.

Young Barclay laughed, as though he wondered if it was to hear this piece of news that he had been called away from the middle of an urgent job in connection with the new boilers in process of being fitted into the Perth. Mackenzie laughed, too.

"Nô, it wasn't to tell you that exactly that I wanted to see you. But it has ref-

erence to it," he said in his rather ponderous way. "You're nearly twenty-six, and for sixteen years you've filled the place a son of mine might have done had I married. And you haven't disappointed me. You did well at school, well at Oxford—better at games perhaps than at your studies; but games teach a man things—discipline, self-reliance. And from Oxford you went straight into the yard, where you haven't been too proud to learn by working alongside of men getting their thirty shillings a week."

"But the men are good chaps; and you see I'm keen on the work—"

"But so many young men aren't keen. They regard work as a necessary evil; they're watching the clock till the moment they can down tools and be off to see other men play football. I've watched you, Jack, and you haven't disappointed me."

"I'm glad of that," the younger man cried boyishly. "Of course, I owed it to you not to shirk—I should have been a rotter if I had, after all you've done for me. But I'm glad to hear you say that."

For a moment James Mackenzie did not speak. There was a little gleam of pride in his eyes as they rested on Jack's face. It was a face that attracted most people at first sight, it was so frank and good-humored; there was manliness in it and character—in the steady gray eyes, in the strong mouth and chin.

"Jack, what all this preamble leads to is this. I'm over sixty now. Of course, if it were a mere matter of money I could have retired long ago—only I'm proud of the concern my father and grandfather built up. I like to think of it being carried on long after I'm gone. Well, what I'm coming to is this." He could not refrain from an impressive pause. "On your twenty-sixth birthday I'm going to take you into partnership."

And he beamed across at Jack, who in the first moment was too much taken aback to find words.

A partnership at twenty-six! He had supposed vaguely that he would some-

day be admitted into the firm, but he had never expected such luck for years to come. There was a boyish eagerness and excitement in his voice that pleased James Mackenzie, as he cried:

"A partnership! Jove, I can't find the words I want to thank you! It takes my breath away—"

"We understand each other, my boy; there's no need to say anything," the older man said, smiling. He had risen, and his hand rested on the other's shoulder. "Of course, I always meant the business should be yours after my death. But though I have no immediate intention of going out of it there's no reason why you shouldn't come into it now. I'm sure the traditions of Mackenzie's will be safe with you. My balance-sheet shall be prepared and the partnership deed drawn up at once."

Mackenzie went into details. Jack had known the firm was flourishing, but how prosperous even he had not realized until he saw those rough figures the older man jotted down. And a one-third partnership in such a firm at six-and-twenty

"But, I say, it *is* good of you, dad!" he cried, the old boyish term replacing the formal "sir" of business hours. "I—Oh, sha'n't I have swelled head when I walk in as junior partner for the first time!"

Mackenzie laughed, no less pleased than the boy. He crossed to a cupboard and unlocked it.

"I like to keep old customs, Jack. I remember thirty-five years ago in this very room my father broke a bottle in honor of my own admission as partner. And now it's my turn to drink to the new partner and to the firm's continued prosperity."

And he wrestled with the cork of a cobwebby bottle that looked as though it might have been reposing there since that other occasion he spoke of.

"There's only one thing—when you marry, Jack, as you'll be in a position to marry now, don't run away from the house that's been your home for so

long. Bring your wife to it. It's big enough for all of us—but it would be too big for me alone. I shouldn't like that," Mackenzie said suddenly.

"Any more than I should like to run away from you, dad!" cried Jack. And he meant it.

"Ah, that's right. And you'll be thinking of marrying soon—why not? I want you to marry; I want to hear the patter of little feet in that big house. And I'm ambitious for you. Oxford brought you friendships with the right kind of people, opened the doors to some of the best houses in London to you. One of these days you'll, perhaps, go into politics, and the sort of match I've set my heart on your making will help your career. I come of a stock of good middle-class people myself, but I want you to look higher than that—as you can, Jack, eh?"

For a moment the younger man's lips moved as though to say something. But whatever it was he left it unspoken. Mackenzie did not see the look that his words seemed to have brought to Jack's face. The door had opened, and he turned.

"Well, Curtis, what is it?"

Curtis was Mackenzie's confidential clerk and secretary. A man of thirty, with sleek black hair brushed back over his brow and a face so curiously expressionless that it always reminded Jack of a mask. Curtis came in with his deferential droop of shoulders and habitual soft tread. He handed a card to his chief.

"Mr. Binston, sir, says he has an appointment."

"Oh, yes, of course. I'll see him in a minute. Jack, I shall have to turn you out now. And I expect you're anxious to be back to those boilers," with a laugh. "By the way, Curtis." The clerk paused on the threshold. "You have some inkling already of what's in the wind. Well, you have an opportunity of paying your respects to the firm's new partner."

Curtis looked across at Jack. There was no hint of any emotion whatever behind the expressionless face. The equally expressionless voice murmured what was exactly correct for the occasion from one of his position toward a future head. Perhaps there was a dry note in Jack's voice, as he made acknowledgement, that seemed to strike Mackenzie.

"Jack," he said abruptly, as the door closed, "I've sometimes thought you didn't like Curtis?"

The younger man shrugged his shoulders indifferently. He had no desire to discuss Curtis. Binston's almost immediate appearance cut short any further conversation, and Jack, for all that he was a partner now, or would be shortly, went back to his job at the boilers, feeling as though treading on air. Only once, with the thought of that expressed ambitious wish of James Mackenzie's, did his face cloud. "The sort of match I've set my heart on your making—"

And Jack Barclay knew that in that at least he would have to disappoint the man to whom he owed everything.

"Only I couldn't tell him to-day. I couldn't disappoint him on the top of his wonderful kindness, dear old chap! But—I wonder what he'll say when he knows?"

CHAPTER II.

THE GIRL WHO CAME BETWEEN.

IT was evident that something had ruffled James Mackenzie when on the next morning Barclay came down to breakfast. There was a little frowning furrow between his bushy gray eyebrows as he sat, glancing through his correspondence, in the long old-fashioned dining-room that overlooked the Bloomsbury Square where two previous generations of Mackenzies had lived. He turned at the younger man's entrance, without responding to his greeting.

"I've just had a letter that concerns you, Jack," he began, evidently fuming.

"Oh, who's it from?"

"It's anonymous."

"Anonymous? Then it's something unpleasant, of course—that goes without saying," Jack responded cheerfully. "What's the particular lie?"

"Well, I should be sorry to think there was any truth in its statement—that you have entangled yourself with a girl lately employed in my office. A stenographer called Wingate."

Jack looked quickly across at him.

"I know Miss Wingate. May I see the letter?"

Mackenzie handed it to him in silence. The letter, which purported to come from "a well-wisher," informed Mr. Mackenzie, with a scarcely veiled malice, that people were coupling the names of his adopted son and Joan Wingate.

"I fancy I can spot the writer," Jack said, glancing up from the letter. "Your clerk, Curtis. You said yesterday you thought I didn't like him. I might have told you that there's little love lost on his side. You see, I once had occasion to knock Curtis down—for insulting Miss Wingate. I look back on it with all the more satisfaction now because I haven't a doubt he wrote this."

"Oh, nonsense!" snapped Mackenzie. "You had a dispute with Curtis, you say, about this former stenographer of mine? Then there is an entanglement?"

"It depends on what you mean by entanglement," said Jack, facing him squarely. "Miss Wingate happens to be the lady I am going to marry."

The older man stared at him blankly, incredulously.

"Marry her? Are you mad?" he broke out explosively.

"In any case I should have told you soon—but after your words of yesterday I felt I must do so at once," Jack said quietly. "I was going to tell you this morning. Miss Wingate has promised to be my wife."

"Oh, I don't doubt she gave that promise readily enough," sneered Mackenzie, a purple vein standing out on

his brow. "And you mean it seriously, that you are going to make such a fool of yourself?"

"Well, of course, there can be two opinions about that," said Jack good-humoredly. "Certainly I am quite serious. It's true Joan Wingate earns her living—is that a fair reason for speaking slightlyingly of her?" He laid a hand on the older man's arm. "Dad, don't let's quarrel over this. I owe everything to you—but even to please you I can't marry to order."

Mackenzie shook his arm free. His resentment flared up against this girl who he felt had entrapped Jack.

"It's ridiculous. Did I send you to Oxford, offer you a partnership—for you to marry a nobody, a girl who typed my letters?" And he snorted angrily. "Thanks to the advantages I have given you, you have the *entrée* to some of the best houses in London. Yet because of a pretty face you calmly tell me you propose to throw away your chances, commit a folly you'll repent all your days!"

His manner was a shade reminiscent of the heavy father of stage-plays—and Jack had a sense of humor. He gave a disarming laugh. He owed too much to the other man not to make allowances for that characteristic hasty temper that would blaze up like straw at a spark. Straw soon burns itself out.

"Dad, can't we talk it over reasonably? After all, I'm not a boy. And in marriage a man must choose for himself."

"But surely it's not asking too much of you not to choose like a fool—this girl who no doubt is laughing up her sleeve to have entrapped a rich man's supposed heir!"

"But you have no right to say that of Miss Wingate." There was a change in Jack's tone. Even from James Mackenzie he would not hear an aspersion on the girl he loved. "She is not mercenary. Even if she were, you have no means of knowing it. When you are calmer you will realize you are not fair."

"I am quite calm!" Mackenzie was white with fury by this time. "Jack, I don't wish to remind you of anything you may owe to me. But you've had your head; all the money you wanted, a good time—"

"Oh, I don't forget that, dad. That's why it hurts me that we should have this disagreement now."

"What else can you expect? Oh, I don't say this girl may not be fond of you—but she's pretty much alive to the advantages of such a marriage where she's concerned. Only don't forget, the deed of partnership isn't signed yet—"

Young Barclay made an impatient gesture.

"I don't wish to appear unduly vain," he said, restraining himself with an effort, "but any supposed advantages had nothing to do with her acceptance of me."

Mackenzie laughed unpleasantly.

"She would hardly be likely to let you know they had. You say I have no proof—come to that, what proof have you? As if she didn't know she'd brought her pretty face to a good market!"

Jack strode across the room. Something was on the tip of his tongue that it needed a strong effort to keep back.

"You're not willing to put her to the proof?" Mackenzie said suddenly.

The younger man turned sharply.

"What do you mean?"

"This. If you persist in flying in the face of my wishes, there's no partnership for you!" cried Mackenzie furiously, bringing down his great fist on the breakfast table. "You'll have to choose between this stenographer and all I meant to do for your future! That's the plain English of it."

He was telling himself that he would bring Jack to his senses for the boy's own sake. Perhaps this self-willed autocratic man really believed at the moment that no sense of the personal equation, his own disappointed ambitions of a brilliant marriage for Jack that would shed reflected luster on himself, too, entered into his feelings.

" You might be Quixotic enough to throw away your future for this girl—but would she be willing to marry a man who, from the position of a rich man's heir, became dependent on what he would earn? Let me put it plainly to her what she has to expect from marrying you. We shall see then if she's so disinterested!" —with a bitter sneer.

" It is hardly likely I should expose her to humiliation or insult."

" Then you're not so sure of her, eh?"

The younger man did not speak. There was no arguing with Mackenzie in such a mood.

" If she's all you profess, why should you wish her not to see me? Insult her? I have no intention of insulting her. I want to show her the position in the event of her marrying you. Will you convey a message—or shall I write myself? I suppose I have a right to see her, considering how long I have stood *in loco parentis* to you!" he snapped.

" And when you see her? If I thought you meant to say anything to hurt her—"

Mackenzie interrupted him impatiently.

" You shall be present to hear all I have to say. I may not feel too kindly disposed to her, but I am not in the habit of insulting women, as your words imply. All I want is to show her the position exactly—not quite the position she has imagined. You can't object to that surely?"

" I will tell her what you say," said Jack after a pause.

" If I see her, it must be to-day, since I leave for Southampton early this evening and sail to-morrow. What time does she leave off work for lunch?"

" Half past one."

" I can see her at two. I can spare half an hour then."

" Then I am to ask her if she will see you here at two—"

" No, not here. I don't do business in my private house. At the office where she used to work," snapped Mackenzie.

There was a passionate gleam in Barclay's eyes; the deliberate offensiveness

of the words strained his patience almost to snapping-point. But he checked back the hot retort. Mackenzie turned abruptly away and picked up his letters again.

For the first time the two men break-fasted in silence. Not another word was exchanged between them until, at two o'clock that afternoon, Jack and Joan Wingate passed through into Mackenzie's private office.

The girl had been very thoughtful during the drive, as her lover motored her down to the dock.

" Jack, I—I was afraid when I promised to marry you that your choice would not be Mr. Mackenzie's. I should never forgive myself if I caused an estrangement between you—"

There was a troubled look in the girl's dark eyes.

" Oh, but that's nonsense! He's like that. A dear good chap at bottom, but utterly unreasonable when he's crossed. He comes to loggerheads with every one—he simply can't help it. Anyhow, I'm not going to give you up, sweetheart. All his kindness to me—and he has been more than kind—doesn't give him the right to stand between me and my happiness."

She was beautiful. Even James Mackenzie had to admit that as the girl came into the room. An upstanding, slender figure, aglow with youth, with all the grace of budding womanhood, she looked a creature of the sunlight and the open air, in spite of her daily routine in a city office.

The delicate oval face with its wild-rose color, crowned by the crinkly waves of dusky, autumn-brown hair; the wide gray eyes, fearless and proud as they confronted the rich man who thought to make his wealth a lever to keep her and the man who loved her apart—all this Mackenzie saw, though with no softening of his purpose. He made a little stiff bow.

" Please sit down."

" No, thank you. I would rather stand."

Her voice, too, had charm. And normally, Mackenzie was more susceptible to a charming voice than to a beautiful face. Only he hardened his heart. She was the girl who had deliberately entrapped Jack to thwart those long-cherished ambitious plans of his.

"I hear from my son—from Jack," correcting himself quickly—the phrase he always used slipped out inadvertently, "that he has asked you to marry him," Mackenzie began. There was a suspicion of hectoring in his voice that brought a fuming resentment to the younger man's face. "To be quite brief, such a marriage would run counter to my hopes for him. He knows my feelings on the matter; but since apparently they have no weight with him, I have no option but to ask you to break off this engagement. I think I can show you that such a marriage will offer fewer advantages than you may have supposed, while I should, of course, be prepared to take into consideration any—ah—natural disappointment on your part—"

Jack stepped forward; his face was white and set.

"I did not bring Miss Wingate here to be insulted!" he cried.

"Kindly let me conduct this interview in my own way," Mackenzie said curtly. "There is no insult in stating the position frankly in plain business terms."

Jack looked from Mackenzie to Joan. The girl's face seemed subtly changed; there was a change in her voice as she said:

"Mr. Mackenzie realizes, of course, that by the nature of my occupation I am accustomed to business methods."

"Exactly," said Mackenzie. "Apart from any question of sentiment, no doubt the thought that such a marriage would make you the wife of a prospectively rich man was not unattractive; only yesterday, indeed, I spoke of a partnership. I may say at once that offer will not hold good if my son chooses to disregard my wishes. In a word, he would have to earn his living independently of me. That

is the position—an altered one from your point of view; and it is only right you should have an opportunity of considering it."

The set of his hunched shoulders was aggressively stubborn. His head was thrust forward like that of an angry bull. He did not glance at Jack, who stood fuming, only restraining himself by an effort. Joan seemed far more calm and self-possessed.

"Yes, of course that does alter the position from my point of view," she said.

Mackenzie smiled inwardly.

"You see, such a marriage, so far from spelling luxury, would mean a struggle. Jack has never had to earn his living or seek work in open competition—"

"Then I am to understand, Mr. Mackenzie, you would wash your hands of—of Mr. Barclay if we married?" the girl said. "That, in spite of having brought him up as your son, you would disown him if he married some one of whom, rightly or wrongly, you disapproved? I want to understand the position quite clearly."

Mackenzie looked at her sharply. She was cleverer than he had thought. She was trying to put him in the wrong—and he didn't feel himself in the wrong. He had a right to expect Jack not to make a fool of himself. Perhaps, he thought with deepening anger and resentment, this girl was hinting that she did not believe he would go to the extreme of keeping his threat if they married in spite of him—was she counting on that?

"Naturally it would alter his future materially if he acted in flat defiance of me. There would be no partnership for him; his expectations at my death would have to be considerably modified. I can't stop him from making a fool of himself—but I have no intention of financing what I consider his folly,"—with a flash of fury.

"Miss Wingate shall not listen to any further insults—" Jack broke out angrily.

But to his surprise it was Joan herself who interrupted him.

"Please," she said to him coolly, with a little gesture of her hands. "I am anxious to hear what Mr. Mackenzie has to propose." And she turned to the older man again.

"I thought you might look at it more reasonably than Jack," Mackenzie went on confidently. "I doubt if he could even support himself at first. A marriage that offers such decided drawbacks—really I cannot see, leaving sentiment out of the question, that I am asking you to sacrifice much, Miss Wingate."

"No, perhaps not, if that is all I am asked to give up," came the cool admission.

"And, as I said, I am prepared to show my practical appreciation of your decision—your very wise decision, I think—not to embark on a marriage that could only be disastrous."

There was a note of triumph in Mackenzie's voice.

"Oh, this is intolerable!" Jack could not restrain himself.

Again it was the girl who checked his interruption.

"Please." She did not glance toward him as she spoke. She addressed herself to Mackenzie again: "Since you put it in that light, and show explicitly how little really I am asked to surrender, I suppose no business person would hesitate—if, of course, it was made worth her while."

There was amazement in Jack's face, an amazement that hurt. It was like a new Joan he was seeing now for the first time. He was more astonished than the older man. Mackenzie had expected nothing else, he was telling himself triumphantly. She was venal of course, ready to be bribed into giving up the man whom she had angled for. Perhaps that had been her game from the start—to be bought off at a high figure.

Already she was revealing herself calculating and mercenary; her hint that the offer must be "worth her while" showed that. Well, he was prepared to pay to free Jack from the toils of this

adventuress. And some day the boy would thank him.

"Then it only remains to discuss the—the terms. Well, I shall not be ungenerous. Have you any suggestion?"

"But I think that should proceed from you. I came at your request; it was you who suggested a bargain," the girl said in a level voice. "You have pointed out the numerous disadvantages of my marrying Mr. Barclay—but, after all, there are advantages too; you, of course, as a business man do not refer to them, just as I, a business woman, cannot allow them to be overlooked—quite apart from the question of sentiment. And sentiment has a value to us women."

Mackenzie looked at her closely. A very business-like young woman, too, evidently bent on driving a keen bargain.

"As I said, I should wish to compensate you adequately. Of course, in the way of actual material loss you are not much of a sufferer." He paused for a moment. "But I would prefer to act generously. I will give you a thousand pounds."

A little cool laugh was her answer. "A thousand pounds? It is said you are a millionaire, Mr. Mackenzie; and this is your adopted son. My 'wounded feelings' would have a much greater value than that in a breach-of-promise court."

Jack listened almost incredulously to this duel between the man to whom he owed everything and the girl he loved. She spoke quite unemotionally, like a woman driving the most shameless of bargains—and yet, when he first had asked her to be his wife, she had refused because she feared James Mackenzie would not approve of his choice. How could Joan have suddenly become as mercenary as she would have him believe now?

Joan did not once glance at him. Her eyes rested on Mackenzie. Her hint was not lost on him. A breach of promise action—she was a remarkably pretty

and attractive girl—no knowing what swinging damages a sentimental jury might not award her. That Jack was a millionaire's adopted son would weigh, of course.

"I don't want to haggle," he said curtly. He had done enough, surely, to open even Jack's eyes to her true colors. "Five thousand. I doubt if any jury would give you that."

"Perhaps not—but you must offer more. After all, why should you profess yourself so doubtful about Mr. Barclay's future?" With a flick of coolness that exasperated Mackenzie—a girl who had been a typist in his office! "A man who can make a century for his county at Lord's must have something in him; his cricketing reputation would be a commercial asset—it has made him many friends, influential friends.

"Five thousand pounds"—for a moment she appeared lost in mental calculation—"at most not much more than two hundred a year safely invested. And in your heart you know you are asking a bigger thing than you admit. Leaving me out of the question, you are eager to save your son from a disastrous marriage, as you called it, that would spoil his career."

Mackenzie's frown deepened. But after all a thousand or so more or less mattered little in comparison with extricating Jack from such a woman's clutches—and in proving himself right and Jack wrong.

"If I said ten thousand pounds, preposterous as the sum is," he began furiously, perhaps with that latter thought uppermost.

The girl shook her head.

"Even yet I am afraid you have not bid high enough. You see it was you who wanted to strike the bargain. You can't expect both to have your own way and to get rid of me cheaply, too."

"It's ridiculous to expect more," Mackenzie stormed, white with fury. "But there's such a thing as over-reaching yourself!"

"Then I shall have to marry Mr. Barclay after all."

"Oh, I doubt if even he, infatuated as he has been, will wish to marry you after this pretty exhibition of your real character!" cried Mackenzie vindictively.

"Oh, but I think you don't know him as I do!" And she shot a glance toward Jack, and for the first time in the interview a little smile crept into her face, a look in her eyes that carried a message to pierce suddenly through Jack's bewilderment.

It was then that James Mackenzie made his *coup de théâtre*. He snatched up his check-book, wrote some words and figures with an angry sputter of his pen, and thrust the check, still wet, toward the girl. She took it and looked down at the amazing figures.

"You will pay this if I agree not to marry Jack?"

"I shall want a written undertaking on your part, of course," Mackenzie said harshly.

She looked up from the check.

"I must seem very undesirable indeed to you, that you are willing to pay fifteen thousand pounds to prevent Jack from marrying me." If there was a momentary break in her voice, she conquered it. "But no written undertaking will be necessary."

Joan walked slowly across to the fire. Stooping, she dropped the check into the heart of the flames. The strip of pink paper blazed up and crumbled into flakes of ash before James Mackenzie's astonished eyes.

CHAPTER III.

FATE WAITS IN THE SHADOW.

FOR a moment or two sheer amazement held James Mackenzie speechless.

Joan still stood looking down into the fire; in its light Jack saw the tears suddenly glistening on her lashes; a little resistless sob shook her.

And in an instant he was by her side, and with a thrill of tenderness, deepened and intensified by his sense of all that her action meant, he put his arms about the slender girlish figure. The millionaire's voice, quivering with fury, cut harshly through the pause.

"What does this mean?"

Joan had to steady her voice as she turned and faced him. The self-composure she had maintained throughout that interview, seemingly so effortlessly, that her pride had forced her to maintain with what difficulty Jack knew now, was slipping from her at last.

"It means that there are things money cannot buy. Oh, I never meant to bargain or traffic—you knew that, didn't you, Jack? If I did not tell you so at first," she said to Mackenzie, "it was only because you were so ready to think the worst of me—to condemn me before you put me on my trial. You were so quick to believe I had entrapped your son, a designing woman to be bought off, that you gave me no opportunity of saying what I was ready to say had you met me differently." Her voice was tremulous; words were very near to tears. "I would have told you that, if it were for Jack's good, I needed no bribe to give him up."

Mackenzie was white with baffled chagrin. He was, too, furious at this unexpected defeat in the moment of his seeming triumph to be generous, to admit that she could hardly have given more convincing proof that he had misjudged her. The sting of his own humiliation was too rankling. She had tricked him completely, had made him look a fool in Jack's eyes.

"Then you—you dared—" he spluttered.

There was a look in Jack's eyes that the older man had never seen in them before.

"Haven't you 'insulted enough the lady I am going to marry?'

The passionate hostility of the words seemed to turn Mackenzie's fury of mor-

tification from Joan to the man by her side. In a moment all the ties that had linked them for years seemed blotted out. In passion a man will do what he will not do in cold blood. Mackenzie turned, and with passion-shaking hands he unlocked the door of the safe, fumbled inside for a moment, and brought out a folded document.

"This is my will," he cried to Jack—"and this is what I do with it!"

He tore the stiff paper across and across with a harsh rending sound, with the fury of a man who sees himself thwarted where he has least expected. With a gesture almost theatrical he flung the fragments into the waste-paper basket.

Young Barclay gave a little short indifferent laugh.

"Come, Joan," he said, turning.

But the girl paused. She had drawn herself from his arm; there was a proud dignity in her bearing as, looking across at Mackenzie, she said in a low voice:

"What I would not do for your bribe I will do for nothing. Because of all that you have done for Jack in the past I won't come between you now. I shall not marry him against your wish."

Joan turned and walked to the door. As Jack opened the door, which gave upon the anteroom where Curtis sat, he had a vague impression of the clerk having moved hastily away from it. They passed through into the yard, where Jack helped her into the car, to drive her back.

"But, sweetheart, you don't mean what you said?" he asked.

Her lip was quivering, the beautiful eyes wet with unshed tears.

"I care for you, as you know—oh, I care beyond telling, dear," she said brokenly—but he read the note of resolution in her voice. "But I don't feel that I can come between you. After all, we can't forget what you owe to him. Because of that, and because of your future, I shall not marry you against Mr. Mackenzie's wish."

In the office as the door closed James Mackenzie flung himself into his chair.

The girl's last words had taken him utterly by surprise.

He was a man of violent temper when anything provoked it, but he had an innate sense of fairness that would assert itself when his anger cooled. And her closing words had gone far to disarm him.

This girl had proved that he was wrong in his estimate of her; and though she had deliberately made a fool of him—well, perhaps his own harsh judgment of her, that she had read from the first moment of their interview, gave her some justification for thus turning his weapons upon himself.

And it had been childish of him to act as he had done in his pique, tear up his will—James Mackenzie felt that now. The simple act disinherited Jack, of course, if he were to make no new will. But if he were to die intestate, all his great fortune would go to some one he had little love for—his one living relative, Hepworth Barnard's daughter.

He had lost sight of her utterly for years—the daughter of the man who had repaid his kindness by trying to defraud him. And, no doubt, like father, like daughter—he had washed his hands of the pair of them years ago. But if he died without a will all his money would go to Olive Barnard—not a penny to Jack.

And Jack had been like his own son—until this girl had come between them. Had his attitude been unreasonable? Mackenzie's mind brought up the face of the girl again, its wistful beauty, the low sweet voice. It had been youth calling to youth. He had wanted Jack to make a socially brilliant match—but what if the boy's happiness was bound up with this girl?

On a sudden impulse Mackenzie rose from his chair and strode out quickly through the outer room and into the yard.

"Has Mr. Jack gone?"

But, of course, as the timekeeper told him, Jack had motored off with Joan five minutes since.

He found Curtis in his room on his return. The man drew himself up quickly, but it struck Mackenzie that the clerk had been having a peep at that torn-up will he had flung into the waste-paper basket. Curtis's uncomfortable glance at him deepened that impression.

"I have just put those accounts from Clay's on your desk, sir," the clerk said. He added, rather hesitatingly: "I am sorry to trouble you, sir, but I wanted to ask if I might leave early to-day. I came over so queer this afternoon—"

"You've chosen a rather inconvenient time to be ill," Mackenzie said dryly, looking sharply at the man. "All right; I suppose you must go. Finish those letters first."

The clerk thanked him and walked back to his room. As he was closing the door he turned. Mackenzie had stooped to pick up those fragments of the will that he had torn up; he was staring at them with a sudden expression as of surprise. Then as the older man looked suddenly round, Curtis went out, closing the door softly behind him.

On the other side of the door the clerk stooped—perhaps it was not the first time Curtis had used the keyhole as a convenient medium of observation.

One or two callers came; for the next hour Mackenzie was kept busy with appointments. But throughout them his mind seemed preoccupied.

Should he acknowledge to Jack that he had been in the wrong?—a difficult task for this stubborn, self-willed man. It was a question still unanswered when he left the office and drove home to Bloomsbury. He was going to Southampton by the four-fifty from Waterloo, to catch the boat for New York early on the following morning.

Was Jack going to let him go without a word? Before leaving the office he had learned by inquiries that Jack had not returned. It hurt him curiously to think that perhaps he had alienated the boy irrevocably. But shortly before it was

time to start for Waterloo, Jack drove up to the house. Mackenzie felt an odd thrill of relief as he heard the younger man come up-stairs and knock at his door.

"I thought you were going to let me start without a glimpse of you," Mackenzie said, conscious of a sudden embarrassment.

"Well, I did feel like it," Jack admitted; his face had lost its usual pleasant, boyish smile. "I felt too angry because of the way you hurt Joan. But—well, I couldn't let you go without saying good-by, even though I felt, as I do still, that you haven't treated me fairly."

"In destroying my will?" said Mackenzie.

"Lord, no; I wasn't thinking of that. But in coming between Joan and me. Perhaps when you're cooler you'll realize you weren't fair. There, don't let's talk about it, or we shall be getting angry again."

The two men drove together to Waterloo.

Barclay was dining at his club at about the time Mackenzie reached Southampton—dining in a very gloomy and unsociable mood, as one or two acquaintances who spoke to him discovered—when a waiter came up, to tell him that some one wanted to speak to him at the telephone.

As he took up the receiver he suddenly understood why Mackenzie had asked where he would be dining that night. For it was Mackenzie speaking to him from Southampton.

"Jack, I suppose you must have your own way," the voice over the long-distance wire said. "I've been thinking it over. We mustn't let anything come between us, you and I. I expect I was a stubborn old fool. Have it your own way. Tell her I'm sorry—and that you're to arrange it between you. It will be all right about the partnership, my boy."

It was a different Jack Barclay who hung up the receiver of the telephone after he and Mackenzie had finished speaking. He was too eager and impatient to wait to finish his interrupted

dinner. He ran out of the club and hailed a taxi; the address he gave was that of the house where Joan Wingate lived.

"And drive like blazes," he said.

The Illyria, by which Mackenzie had booked his passage, made the crossing in good time. From New York a brief cable reached Jack informing him that Mackenzie had arrived to find that business might unexpectedly delay his absence in America longer than he had expected.

And two days after that cablegram announced Mackenzie's arrival in New York, an inspector of police called to inform Jack Barclay that the body of an elderly man had been found, in circumstances that pointed to murder, in a lonely house near Southampton—and would Mr. Barclay go Southampton forthwith to identify the dead man, who, the police had every reason to suppose, was Mr. James Mackenzie.

CHAPTER IV.

"FIND THE WOMAN!"

JACK BARCLAY came out of the long, bare room, with its distempered walls that served as a mortuary, like a man stunned.

He had been utterly unprepared for that tragic revelation awaiting him there, as the white sheet was drawn aside from the still figure that it outlined, and his eyes had rested for a moment of shuddering horror on the dead, familiar face.

Throughout the journey to Southampton he had refused to believe that the murdered man found late on the previous afternoon in an untenanted house could be James Mackenzie.

The thing had seemed impossible in face of that cablegram of two days ago. How could the man who had cabled to him from New York be lying dead in Southampton?

Now he knew the worst. Whoever it was had sent that cable from America,

and for whatever purpose, James Mackenzie had never left England. Possibly he had been lying dead even before the *Illyria* had left Southampton Docks. The horror of it seemed to grip Barclay by the throat.

He nodded in response to the police-officer's questioning glance. At first he found difficulty in controlling his voice to speak.

"Yes, that is James Mackenzie."

Under that white sheet lay the man to whom he had said good-by at Waterloo eight days ago, shot through the heart.

In the doctor's judgment all the signs pointed to his having been dead for more than a week.

Plainly not a case of suicide—all the known circumstances of the case indicated foul play; the fact that the dead man had been found in a locked, empty house; that the money and papers known to have been in his possession were no longer on him—and, above all, there was that mysterious cable from America in James Mackenzie's name. A case of murder deliberately planned.

"We've been to the shipping agents, and we cabled over to the captain of the *Illyria* in New York," the police-inspector told Jack. "We have ascertained definitely that some one crossed by the boat who called himself Mackenzie."

The captain's cabled description of this passenger tallied almost uncannily with that of the dead man. It was not the steamship line by which Mackenzie had usually traveled, and he was not known personally to the ship's officers. This passenger, the captain added, had kept very much to his cabin throughout the voyage.

Who was it had cabled in the dead man's name—and why?

As yet the whole affair seemed enshrouded in impenetrable mystery. Mackenzie had not been seen at the hotel where he had intended to put up for that night. Whatever it was that had befallen him, it must have followed swiftly on his arrival at Southampton.

Jack Barclay drove with the inspector to the small semi-detached untenanted house on the outskirts of the town where, by the merest chance, the tragic discovery had been made. A prospective tenant had gone to view the house on the previous afternoon—to stumble on the dead man lying in the passage behind the door. The weapon had not been found.

Already the news had spread. A little crowd hung about the gate, staring up at the blank windows, discussing the tragedy with morbid relish, as the two men passed through.

For Jack the enclosed air of that bare, unfurnished place seemed still to hold a lingering infecting horror. He had always felt a very deep and genuine attachment for Mackenzie, had always realized how much he owed to his kindness; that one quarrel on the last day he had seen James Mackenzie alive was the only serious difference that had ever arisen between them. Perhaps it had been the last act of the older man's life, before the shadow of fate stretched out to him, to telephone that message from Southampton healing the breach.

Out of the first numbing shock of horror a fierce passionate anger had mounted up in Jack's mind like flame; these unknown guilty men must be hunted down and made to pay in full!

But so far at least they seemed to have covered their traces effectually. The one trifling clue as yet found the police had lighted upon in this tenantless house—a woman's handkerchief marked with the initials "L. S."

It seemed to suggest a woman in the case.

"A woman in the case? Yes, one may generally reckon on that!" said the inspector sententiously. "And, as it happens, we have some definite grounds for such a supposition—something more definite than the handkerchief."

He paused for a moment impressively.

"We've got to find a woman who drove a motor-car through this road shortly before midnight two nights ago."

Jack Barclay glanced quickly across at the police-inspector.

"Then you have found out something," he cried.

"This, that the dead man was brought to this house two nights ago—roughly a week, according to medical evidence, after Mr. Mackenzie's death. Of course, it had all been carefully planned beforehand by men intimately acquainted with Mr. Mackenzie's movements. This was not a case of a sudden opportunity suggesting a crime. The accomplice who assumed his identity on the boat, who cabled his supposed safe arrival in New York—all that had been planned before ever Mr. Mackenzie reached Southampton."

"But why should you think Mr. Mackenzie was brought to this house as lately as two nights ago?"

Jack's voice was a little puzzled.

"For one thing, the *Illyria* reached New York two days ago. The men who planned this would not dare to risk their crime being discovered until then," the inspector said. "Think of the risks run by that accomplice on board the *Illyria*, had the dead man been found before he stepped off the boat on the other side! With the hue and cry raised, the cable set working, the long arm of wireless reaching out—inevitably the man masquerading as Mackenzie would have been arrested on landing. And there's another thing."

And he went on to tell Jack a piece of curious information that had been furnished to the police by the occupant of the adjoining house.

From the statement of this man, Granger by name, it appeared that two nights ago, shortly before twelve, he had been awakened by his wife who was convinced she had heard the sound of some one moving in the empty house.

Granger could hear nothing; had ridiculed what he considered his wife's nervous fancies. However, to satisfy her—or to prove that she was wrong—he had got up and stood listening against the partition wall. All he could hear was the

sound of a motor-car passing slowly down the quiet road—a car driven by a woman, as Granger saw through the half-drawn curtains of the window.

At the time he had noticed that this woman seemed to be staring intently either at his house or the empty house next door.

As he got back into bed he thought he heard this car stop some distance down the road. Almost in the same moment his wife started up with a little cry; and this time Granger heard it, too—a sound that at such an hour seemed curious and not a little disquieting. It was the sound of the front door of the tenantless house being opened and closed again cautiously, of footsteps coming out.

Jumping out of bed again, Granger had caught a glimpse of the figures of two men walking quickly away. A minute or so later he heard the distant stationary car begin to move—rapidly this time—as though it had been waiting for them.

The man who had told this story to the police was not of very prepossessing appearance, Jack thought, as they caught sight of him over the fence of the back garden. The inspector spoke to him.

"Then you only heard these men go away, Mr. Granger? You didn't hear them come to the house?"

"No. But my wife had heard the car before she awakened me—had heard it stop near the house." Granger had a curiously nervous manner. As he spoke he seemed to regard Jack with a furtive interest, though his eyes dropped as those of the latter met them. "Mind you, it wasn't the front door they went to, or trust my wife for having heard—though it was by the front door they came out."

By the side of the house a passage led to a back gate. The police had found signs of a window at the back having been unfastened from the outside by a knife. There was little doubt it was by this window that the house had been entered.

The news of James Mackenzie's mysterious death was in all the evening pa-

pers that day, with an orgy of flaring headlines. Jack Barclay remained the night in Southampton. He intended to prolong his stay there for the present, to be on the spot should any new discovery be made.

But a telegram the next morning changed his plans. A telegram from the dead man's bank, that took him back post-haste to London.

"I was more than shocked to read the news in last night's paper, Mr. Barclay," the manager said—"and, I may add, startled, too, for other reasons. On the day after the *Ilyria* sailed a check was presented, bearing Mr. Mackenzie's signature, for a very large sum."

There was palpable uneasiness in the manager's manner. He watched the other man's face as he scrutinized the canceled check.

It was a check for nine thousand pounds, made payable to Mr. Robert Kaye or bearer, dated the day the *Ilyria* left Southampton — probably the day after Mackenzie had died. The name Kaye was quite unknown to Jack.

"A forgery, I should say," the latter said shortly, after a scrutiny of the handwriting. "But a bad imitation of his signature—but I don't believe Mr. Mackenzie ever wrote this."

The manager handed him a letter in the same writing as the check. The letter ran:

DEAR OSBORN:

Am leaving by the *Ilyria* this morning. Have drawn a check for £9,000, and as the bearer will be unknown to you and the sum large, I am covering it with this note—which I write with difficulty, having injured my hand yesterday in the train, thanks to a fool of a porter's clumsiness. Am putting in a claim to the railway company for damages.

Yours, *et cetera,*

JAS. MACKENZIE.

It was just the sort of letter that Mackenzie might have written—but the heading of the notepaper alone was enough to proclaim it a forgery—that of the Southampton hotel at which Mackenzie had never put in his expected appearance.

And that was an added proof that the signature on the check was a forgery, too.

So this had been the motive behind the plot that had resulted in James Mackenzie's death!

"Of course with that letter—and the explanation why the signature was not quite Mr. Mackenzie's usual one—the check was honored without question," the bank manager began nervously.

"What was the man like who presented it?" Barclay interrupted.

The clerk was sent for who had paid the money, in notes chiefly, the numbers of which had been taken—but, of course, the criminals had had a week in which to change them.

A man of about forty, with a short, dark beard and mustache, had presented the check; the clerk could only describe him in vague generalities. But he remembered that this man had driven up in a motor-car, and through the swing-doors of the bank he had noticed in it a young smartly dressed woman—of rather theatrical appearance, he added.

The third piece of evidence pointing to a woman in the case.

Barclay thought of that woman who had driven a car slowly up and down a dark, quiet road in Southampton at midnight three nights ago.

"Find the woman!"

But how?

On leaving the bank, Barclay telegraphed this latest piece of news to the police at Southampton; then took a taxi to the dead man's solicitors. Messrs. Bennett & Haig were an old-established firm who had done Mackenzie's legal business for years. The senior partner who received Barclay had been profoundly shocked by the tragedy, which he evidently felt in a personal as well as professional sense.

It was in the senior partner's room that for the first time the realization came to Jack Barclay how this tragedy was likely to affect his own future.

"Of course, Mr. Barclay," the lawyer was saying, "with the exception of cer-

tain minor legacies, you succeed to our late client's great wealth. The will drawn up by us was in Mr. Mackenzie's possession—”

“ But that will was destroyed,” said Jack, with the sudden remembrance of that angry scene when in a moment of passion Mackenzie had torn up the will before his eyes and those of Joan Win-gate.

A blank look came into the old lawyer's face as the younger man recounted the circumstances. No doubt Mackenzie had meant to make a new will in Jack's favor—his words over the telephone from Southampton, admitting himself in the wrong, and referring again to the proposed partnership, indicated that he regretted his hasty action. But the vital point was that he had destroyed the existing will.

“ Yes, he certainly spoke to us about the contemplated partnership. But unfortunately, most unfortunately, there is nothing in writing. Mr. Mackenzie was leaving it until his return from America. And if that will was destroyed, and no fresh one made—”

“ He's hardly likely to have done that,” Jack said. “ It all happened shortly before he left for Southampton. And everything seems to prove that he was lured to his death soon after reaching there.”

“ You see, you were only his adopted son; there was no tie of blood. Without a will, I am afraid, sadly afraid, Mr. Barclay that—well, that you will get nothing.”

It seemed pretty clear that Mackenzie had made no later will before starting for Southampton—Curtis, the confidential clerk, was emphatic on that point. Inquiries elicited that no one among the staff had been called in to witness any such document. A thorough search was made through the dead man's desk and in the safe, as a forlorn hope—and, as Jack had expected, uselessly.

Practically no doubt remained that the millionaire had died intestate—and the man who had been brought up with the expectation of being his heir, who had

never known the want of money in his life, and within the last ten days had been promised a partnership in “ Mackenzie's,” now found himself practically without a penny in the world, and dependent on his own efforts for his very bread and butter.

CHAPTER V.

THE GIRL WHO HAD FAILED.

AS Leila Vail came out of the inner office and made her way through the anteroom, filled with its babel of voices all talking at once, and the reek of violet powder, no one would have guessed from her face that the interview just over, of exactly three minutes, had given her a knock-down blow.

She was proud, this girl of four or five and twenty, with character as well as a rather uncommon beauty in the dark, almost gipsy-like face; too proud to betray a hint of the bitter, unexpected rebuff she had encountered.

She nodded with a smile to the girl with whom she had been talking before her interview with Mr. Benolio, then made her way out through the chattering groups that had overflowed onto the landing and dingy staircase, and down into the narrow street behind the Strand.

At the entrance a brass door-plate proclaimed, “ Mr. Benolio—Theatrical Agent.” But even without the plate it did not need much discrimination to recognize that this was a rendezvous of “ the profession.”

Little groups stood on the narrow pavement, all talking loudly and with a trick of exaggerated emphasis, as though the habit of pitching the voice to carry to the back of the pit had become second nature, while they exchanged animated “ shop.”

Here and there were ladies who had attired themselves for these dingy purlieus of mimeland after a fashion that would have seemed less incongruous at a garden party. But the prevailing note

was one of shabbiness; most of Mr. Benolio's clients were of the smaller-fry of the stage—provincial actors and actresses with no hope of anything better than an engagement to tour in the second-rate towns, and many of them prepared to be content with a shop in a "fit-up" company.

Some of them stared after Leila Vail as if with speculative curiosity. Unlike them, there was nothing about this girl to suggest the footlights—though for five years she had been struggling to make both ends meet in that profession of heart-breaking disappointments.

It was noon of the day after Jack Barclay's interview with the dead man's solicitors; the midday editions of the evening papers were just out. At a news-agent's door a contents bill was displayed: "Southampton Murder-Mystery—Latest."

Leila Vail's eyes rested on the placard mechanically, but they did so quite unseeingly; she was absorbed in her own bitter disappointment. She was a failure—a failure!

Except for a recent stray week in a sketch put on for a trial in the country, she had been "out" since early autumn; and the salaries paid in third-rate touring companies do not allow of much putting by for the inevitable rainy day. Then had followed the weary round of daily visits to the agents, the applications by post to managers that usually remained unanswered.

But this morning she had received a communication from Mr. Benolio:

"Come up and see me at once; think I have got something good for you."

She had sent in her name at the agent's and reconciled herself to the long inevitable wait that falls to the lot of unimportant persons at a theatrical agency. Finally Benolio, happening to come out of his inner room in conversation with a departing caller, had glanced in her direction. He had an air of having completely forgotten about her until she rose eagerly.

"Mr. Benolio—"

"Ah, my dear, how are you? Come in here a moment." Then as she followed him into the inner room: "Fact is, you should have come earlier. That part I wrote you about—I'm afraid it was filled half an hour ago."

"But I have been waiting here more than an hour, Mr. Benolio. I sent my name in," she had protested desperately.

But the agent did not appear to hear.

"Very sorry, my dear—and you'd have just suited, too. But it can't be helped. Look in again when you're passing. I won't forget you. G'by."

It was true that in a sense she was no worse off than before she had received that message from the agent—except in disappointment and heartache. Only how full of hope she had been that morning—and how sorely she needed an engagement!

The tired, rather sullen-looking girl with whom she had been talking in the waiting-room had followed her downstairs, and as Leila was walking away overtook her and touched her arm.

"You're in luck, I suppose? What's Benolio 'shopped' you for?" she asked enviously. Leila's smiling nod to her in leaving had given her that impression.

She was a white, anemic-looking girl, not without a kind of commonplace prettiness, in a shabby, soiled summer frock much too thin for a March day. The two had once been on tour together.

"Some people have all the luck!" she went on. "Every time I go it's the same—I never can see Benolio, only his secretary, and it's always: 'Nothing for you to-day, Miss Martyn. Give a look in when you're passing.' Oh, how I hate the profesh!" she broke out vindictively. "Sometimes I feel I could just howl."

And she dabbed her eyes with her absurd little handkerchief.

"Oh, I've not had any luck," Leila said with a little dreary smile. "He sent for me to come up about a good engagement I was to have—only I suppose someone he wanted to oblige more than me hap-

pened to come in, and she's got it." She had paused in front of a teashop. "I'm going in to have some tea—I was too excited before I left home to have any breakfast. And even if one can't get engagements, one must eat, I suppose. Are you coming in, too?"

The other hesitated before she spoke.

"No, I—I had breakfast so late. I'm not a bit hungry."

But for an instant there was an almost wolfish look in Miss Martyn's eyes, as they glanced at the food in the window. Leila Vail saw it—and understood.

If she hesitated at all before her next words, it was only for a second. Leila was hard-up enough herself; already she had been compelled to dip into that tiny store jealously put by for the rainy day; every penny counted. Only she could not resist that look in the other's white pinched face.

"Come in and have some tea with me," she said abruptly. "Whether you're hungry or not, you can keep me company."

And she put her hand on the other's arm and drew her inside.

"Well, you are a trump! I was just ready to drop for want of something," Dolly Martyn cried impulsively, forgetting her previous disclaimer; and her eyes glistened as Leila ordered poached eggs on toast for the two of them.

Her drooping spirits reviving, she straightened her hat, dabbed her face energetically with a powder-puff by the mirror near them, and prepared once more to take a cheerful view of the world.

"I say, my dear, it was rank rotten luck for you this morning. I couldn't have taken it like you did—such a smack in the eye as that. He's a beast is Benolio. All agents are, for that matter. Still, I suppose it don't matter so much to you," with a glance at the other's clothes.

The plain, dark-blue tailor-made coat and skirt were by no means new, but they were well cut; and Leila too knew how to "put on" her clothes, which after all is a subtle gift not vouchsafed to all women. Then Dolly added:

"You know I'm fairly ashamed to be seen at Benolio's in this hat—always smelling of benzine too! I always feel that every one there knows it by heart!"

Not much to her! Leila gave a little hard laugh. Perhaps it meant as much to her, this "resting" as to Dolly—more, because of that other mouth to fill, little four-year-old Elsa. Only she was too proud to wear her heart on her sleeve.

"And of course, too, you with a husband aren't so—"

Dolly Martyn stopped abruptly with a sudden awkward embarrassment, and felt she could have bitten out her tongue. What a fool she was to let it run away with her like that!

For a moment there was silence. Dolly stole a furtive glance at her friend's face. She saw how it had suddenly hardened, flushed with a deeper color.

Her husband! No wonder Dolly had checked herself so abruptly, Leila reflected bitterly. Oh, she had cause to be proud of her husband! The man she had married after a brief acquaintance, she a stage-struck girl, and he playing lead in the same obscure touring company—to find out so soon the real man he was, the bitter mistake she had made.

That short-lived infatuation that she had mistaken for love—he had killed that, as he had killed all her respect, long before the day when one of his shady transactions had brought him at last within the grip of the law. It was only a few months ago that her husband had come out of prison, convicted of a particularly mean fraud, the shameless systematic victimising of stage-struck girls.

Everyone in the profession had heard of the notorious case.

"You've read about this queer murder at Southampton?" said Dolly, eager to cover up that unfortunate reference by changing the subject, as a boy with a sheaf of evening papers opened the door and glanced round enquiringly.

"No. I never care about reading of horrors."

"Oh, but this one—well, you do sur-

prise me! It's so mysterious and all that. The murder of an old gentleman called Mackenzie. Mr. James Mackenzie—why, you seem quite startled, my dear!"

"Do I? Only because I once knew a Mr. Mackenzie. Not, of course, that it's likely to be the same. There are so many Mackenzies."

"Oh, this won't be the one you knew, my dear," said Dolly confidently. "For this one was a millionaire: he owned a dry dock, whatever that is—"

She stopped to stare in surprise after her companion, who had abruptly risen and crossed quickly over to the door to buy a paper. Leila Vail sat reading the account of the discovery of the murdered man in that empty house in Southampton, as if oblivious of her companion.

"I thought it would interest you—but, I say, you're letting your eggs get cold," said Dolly, between mouthfuls. "Not the Mr. Mackenzie you knew, I suppose?"

But the woman absorbed in that newspaper report did not seem to hear. And Dolly had no observation.

Presently they left the teashop and walked as far as the Strand together, where they parted. Leila Vail—her professional name; in private life she was Mrs. Hector Solwith—seemed curiously preoccupied as she journeyed back to the drab block of buildings in a dingy street in Clapham where she and her husband and child lived.

It was a relief, as she let herself into the tiny flat, overlooking the noisy street where unwashed children played all day, and where most of the marketing appeared to be done from raucous-voiced costers' carts, to know that her husband was not at home.

He had been away for more than a week; she was used to these absences of his—grateful for them. They had drifted as far apart as husband and wife could drift.

But for one thing she would have left him finally on his release from prison. But Solwith had threatened her through her child. He had done nothing, he told her,

for which the law would grant her a separation with the custody of the child. If she left him, she would go alone—without Elsa.

It was Leila who kept the flat going. The stage as a profession had been virtually closed to her husband since his conviction—though he still seemed generally to have plenty of money to squander on gambling and drinking with his friends.

"Oh, what a fool I was!" she said to herself fiercely, thinking of that fatal irrevocable mistake that the plain gold band on her finger symbolised. "What a fool!"

To-day a new bitterness of revolt seemed to stir in her, as she looked round the bare, comfortless room—perhaps something in the newspaper had reminded Leila Vail to-day of her own bringing-up that had been so different, in surroundings so far removed from these.

The girl gave a little shiver, as she tried to stir the dying fire into a blaze; but it was not cold that made her shiver.

So different her girlhood had been—those years spent in an expensive finishing school, from which she had been taken away hurriedly in the middle of a term when she was just seventeen.

She had hardly understood at first, on her return from the school, why their old friends seemed suddenly to have cooled off, or why her father had given up the home where she had been born, and gone to much less desirable quarters.

Not until months later had she understood—when her father had shot himself to escape arrest! A man with an ineradicable black streak in him, he seemingly had been incapable of running straight.

She had learned then that why their only living relative had washed his hands of them utterly was because he was among those whom her father had defrauded, though he had refrained from prosecuting.

In her fierce pride and independence the girl had gone away, hidden herself from all her old friends. She had felt as if her father's shame tainted her. She had changed her name, cut herself free of

every link that bound her to the old life, when she had gone on the stage to try to earn her own living.

And on the stage she had met Hector Solwith—to be disillusioned so soon. Two men who between them had spoiled her life, her father and her husband! The dark smouldering eyes staring into the fire were full of passion.

But for her father's sin, she might today have been an heiress—Leila Vail, who was the one living relative James MacKenzie had left!

CHAPTER VI.

THE OPENING DOOR.

LEILA'S husband came back without warning two days later.

It was characteristic of Solwith when away from home that he would never trouble to let his wife know the day of his return. Leila found him in the flat when she came in from another fruitless journey in search of an engagement.

She had heard that they were trying voices for a new production at one of the theaters, and just now she would have been thankful for an engagement in the chorus, even though it might be regarded professionally as a "come-down." But she had had no luck.

Hector Solwith glanced round as she opened the door of the little sitting-room. The faint odor of whisky that tainted the atmosphere met her on the threshold as she paused conscious of a little shrinking sense of repulsion. His manner, as he greeted her, told her that he had been drinking.

"Well, my dear, this is a pleasant surprise you didn't bargain for, eh?—and you seem so overjoyed at my return that you're struck positively dumb! Luckily joy seldom kills!" he said banteringly. "Been over in Belgium a week or two—might have sent you a picture post-card if I'd thought of it, knowing how you'd be counting the days to my return!"

Then suddenly with a change of voice:

"No one's been at the flat asking for me while I've been away?"

"No."

Solwith gave a boisterous laugh, in which there might have been a shade of relief, as he drained the glass of whisky by his side. He was a tall man with a typical actor's face, not without some claims to good looks, but coarsened by his habits of dissipation. The eyes were furtive and crafty, and there was a hint of cruelty about his mouth.

"Come, this isn't much of a welcome! I thought at the least you'd weep tears of joy on my neck at this return of the wanderer to his ancestral halls," he cried, in playful travesty of his stage manner.

And he caught her in his arms and pressed his lips on her cheek. There was a spice of cruel amusement in his smile when he saw her shrinking repulsion, as she struggled fiercely to free herself. But he held her tight for a moment before he let her go.

"Upon my word, you're a model loving wife, aren't you!" he said gibingly with a shrug of his shoulders, as she pulled herself away, panting, and with flashing, passionate eyes. "Elsa's at Nellie's of course?"

Nellie was Solwith's married sister, Mrs. Fenn, who lived a few streets away. She was fond of the child, and usually Elsa was left in her care when Leila had to go out to the agents.

Leila went out of the room. She did not know whether she hated her husband more when he was in a bantering good humor as now, or in those darker evil moods of drink when he half-terrified her by his threats. She gave a little shiver as she went to take off her hat and coat.

Presently, as she busied herself in the kitchen, Solwith came out into the hall. She heard him jingling money in his pocket, evidently on the best of terms with the world—little enough of it would come her way for housekeeping expenses, she knew.

"I'm off out. I may be out some time," he shouted from the door.

And slammed the door after him, to Leila's intense relief.

No doubt he was going to look up some of his disreputable acquaintances. She only hoped he would not bring any of them back with him, to sit up drinking late into the night.

Leila went into the sitting-room, and flung up the window to rid it of the sickening fumes of stale tobacco and whisky.

She stood for a moment staring down into the fire. A woman whose face left the impression of more than mere beauty—of individuality and character; the smouldering eyes held an odd suggestion of latent passions stronger, for good or evil as fate might decide, than in most women.

A fierce, passionate loathing of this life, of the man to whom she was bound, shook her. If only she could have gone away for ever, and her child! Only her prison doors were locked. It was as though those tiny childish hands themselves had barred and bolted them. Had there not been Elsa—Elsa whom she loved as deeply as she hated the child's father—not a day, not an hour would she have remained under the same roof with him.

And in this sordid environment her child must grow up and pass those most impressionable years of her life. If this woman ached for different surroundings, cleaner associations, friends of the class to which she had belonged, it was a hundred times more for Elsa's sake than her own. What chance would Elsa have, growing up to childhood, to womanhood, here?

She made an impatient gesture. There was no way out. What had the future to offer better than the present, better than the past years of her married life?

Once she had dreamed of making a success on the stage. Now repeated disappointments had disillusioned her. She had her measure of talent, she knew, talent and good looks that, given a chance, might have carried her far. Only would she ever have a chance of showing what she was capable of? She had no influence

—and she knew how much influence counts for in the theatrical profession, as she knew too how often that word "influence" embraces an ugly meaning.

Leila pulled herself with a jerk out of these brooding hopeless thoughts. It was nearly five o'clock already and there were household duties to be done before she went to bring Elsa home.

Her husband had left a copy of the evening paper on the table. Before setting about her tasks, she picked it up. Was there any further news about the Southampton murder mystery?

If she had not felt any particular personal sorrow at James Mackenzie's end, it was not that she was naturally hard or unsympathetic. Only she had never forgotten how this man, her mother's cousin, had disowned her and her father nearly eight years ago. Had never forgiven him—the iron had entered too deeply into her soul.

Her father, who had tried to defraud him—Mackenzie's treatment of him was merited no doubt; but herself—why had she been made to pay for what was altogether her father's sin, and not any wrongdoing of her own?

Leila took up the paper and turned to the latest news of the case. So far, apparently, the police had made no discovery—or, if they had, no hint of it had been allowed to creep into the press.

Then, as she glanced down the column, a paragraph seemed to leap out to her eyes. And for a moment the woman turned quite white as she stared at it with a sudden intake of her breath.

"It can't be true! It can't be true!" she whispered to herself, as if incredulous of her own eyes.

She was trembling from head to foot. How could she believe that news that seemed so incredible, or her brain grasp that overwhelming fact suddenly hammering at the door of her mind with its stupendous significance?

"It can't be true!" Leila whispered again, as if she almost feared to admit the truth to herself all at once—this utterly

undreamed-of thing that had made her brain reel dizzily.

Yet here was the paragraph in the paper:

It is understood that the victim of the Southampton tragedy, Mr. James Mackenzie, has died intestate and that the dead man's solicitors, Messrs. Bennett & Haig, of Lincoln's Inn Fields, are making inquiries for the present whereabouts of Miss Olive Leila Barnard, his next of kin and only surviving relative, who will succeed to his enormous fortune, said to amount to over one million pounds."

And she had been Olive Barnard before her father's crime and disgrace had driven her into the exile of those last bitter years—she was the dead millionaire's heiress!

CHAPTER VII.

THE CLOSING DOOR.

AS Leila stood there, her face flushed and eager, her lips parted, with eyes riveted on that paragraph in the paper that in a moment had changed the whole face of the world for her, she looked strangely young, more like a girl still in her teens—like the girl of five years ago before marriage had brought its bitter disillusionment.

The petty shifts and struggles and humiliations, the daily heart-breaking search for an engagement, the embittering hopeless sense of failure—none of these things could touch her any more; they had passed out of her existence like breath from a glass. She was the heiress to James Mackenzie's great fortune—a million pounds waiting only to be claimed! She could hardly realize it yet, all that it meant—only the one tremendous outstanding fact.

The woman who, only that morning, had come back weary and hopeless from a fresh rebuff—she was not that woman. That was all part of a bad dream, a dream to forget and leave behind her. At a step she could go back to that social world she had once moved in, that was hers by right of birth.

A wild, hysterical laugh broke from her.

But the laugh died away suddenly on her lips. Between her and that vista of glittering promise had come the remembrance of the man she had married.

Her husband! When she claimed this fortune that was hers—what of him? When she tried to take her place again in her own social order—what of him? Her father's disgrace would no doubt have been forgotten. He was dead; his sins would not be visited on her now. But her husband, the central figure of that notorious swindling case—the man but recently out of jail, drunken, dissipated—his shadow fell across the opening gates of that future that he would poison for her and her child.

The sudden light had died out of the woman's eyes. The story of his unsavory record would be rehashed up for the public delectation. In spite of her wealth, with such a husband she would be looked at askance; doors would remain shut that might have opened welcomingly to her alone. He would taint her future, as he had tainted the present, unless—

She stood quite still, holding her breath as if hardly daring to breathe, in the gathering shadows of the fire-lit room, as the wild thought came to her.

Unless she could slip out of her life here, she and her child, and leave this man behind! Was it possible?

Her real name, her relationship to the dead man, were alike unknown to her husband. At the time of her marriage the same fierce pride that had her drop out from the circle of those who had known her as Olive Barnard, and change her name, had made her shrink from breathing a hint even to the man she had married.

Had it proved a love-match, no doubt she would have told her husband sooner or later. As it was, she had realized soon enough that Hector Solwith was the sort of man to try to trade on her relationship to rich James Mackenzie.

She had never told him.

That desperate plan that had flashed into her mind—dared she risk it?

She seemed to hear the beating of her own heart in the stillness of the room, as she put that question to herself. Oh, she was tempted, tempted! So much was at stake—Elsa's future, her own future.

"Dare I risk it?"

When, as James Mackenzie's heiress, she took her place again among people of her own class, it was intolerable to think of her husband's shameless record dogging her—to be visited, as inevitably the world would visit it, on her child and herself.

The woman's dark eyes gleamed and her mouth was resolute with determination. She would risk it! Her father's disgrace had embittered her childhood—but she would take her fate into her own hands now!

After all, was the risk so great? The very audacity of her plan might carry it through. There was not one figure of her old life who could associate her with the obscure touring actress, Leila Vail; she was sure of that. She had severed every link when, more than six years before, she had dropped out of sight and knowledge of all who had known Hepworth Barnard and his daughter.

Who could challenge her story if she reappeared now as a woman who had been living abroad, had married abroad, whose husband had died abroad?

And if any one who had known Leila Vail were to run across James Mackenzie's heiress—well, the world is full of chance resemblances, even startling resemblances. Besides, once she had entered into possession of this fortune, she and Elsa need not remain in England. The wide ways of the world were open to her now.

Already her mind was rapidly outlining her plans. She must lose no time. Tonight she would slip away with Elsa, tonight bid a last farewell to the life of disillusionment and failure—and that marriage that had become a curse. Tonight was to be an end and a beginning.

There were few preparations to make. Some drawers to be gone over, photo-

graphs and letters to be destroyed, a small bag to be packed. Her hands moved with feverish haste, in tune with her racing thoughts. To-morrow should find her and Elsa far on that journey that would know no return to this dingy flat in a dingy street, or to the husband who could have no clue to the mystery of her flight. What had he done to deserve better treatment at her hands? A bitter smile made her mouth hard.

At the worst, should her husband ever trace her—then she had a last weapon: she must buy him off, buy his silence. Only that should be the last resource. She knew Hector Solwith too well—how he would prey on her, threaten her, if he ever found out her secret.

Her preparations were all made at last. The little store put by for the rainy day was in her purse—that would suffice for the carrying out of her plans. She would go now to fetch Elsa. She and Elsa were slipping out of their prison!

Even yet it all seemed more like a dream to her, something strangely unreal, as she gave a final glance round the room before turning down the light, to assure herself that she had forgot nothing. The gas-light glinted on something in her husband's Gladstone bag, that stood open on the floor still unpacked—something half hidden among its jumbled contents.

Leila stooped and picked it up, scarcely knowing why—a heavy silver cigar-case.

She had never seen it before. Certainly this case, evidently a costly one, could not have been in her husband's possession long—but the sight of it, as she looked more closely, seemed to bring a swift change to her face.

It was something engraved on the case that had called that startled look to her eyes—a crest.

In Heaven's name, how did it come to be in her husband's possession—this cigar-case engraved with the crest of her mother's family—of James Mackenzie's family?

It was as though the startled woman

found something strangely suggestive in the sight of that glittering silver thing she held in her hands.

As she stood staring at it, with perplexity and more than a hint of dawning fear in her eyes, she heard the click of the latch-key in the hall door; and some one came hurriedly into the flat. Her husband—and she had meant to be gone before he came back. He must not see her preparations for flight.

Quickly she dropped the cigar-case into the bag again, and turned down the light in the bedroom, her heart in her mouth.

But Solwith walked straight into the sitting-room. Peeping out, Leila was surprised to see that for some reason her husband had turned down the gas there. Could she reach the door without his seeing the bag she carried?

Softly she crept down the narrow lobby. Then through the open door of the sitting-room Leila saw something that struck her with a curious impression. Her husband's figure was outlined against the dull firelight—he had pulled aside a corner of the blind and was staring down in an oddly furtive manner into the street. It was as though he had turned down the gas that he might not be seen from the road below.

A board creaked under her feet as she paused. Solwith gave a nervous start and turned a white face toward her. He looked like a man suddenly very much afraid—of what should he be afraid? There was unmistakable relief in his eyes as he saw his wife.

"Why do you go creeping about the flat like that?" he broke out in a gust of anger. "For a moment I thought—"

But what it was he had thought Leila was not to hear. Solwith checked himself abruptly.

"I am going for Elsa now," she said.

That white, scared look of his, that had transformed him from the jaunty, gibing man of an hour ago, had communicated its odd, vague thrill of apprehension to her, too.

Solwith turned away without another word, and Leila slipped out. He had not seen the bag she carried. She hurried down the stairs.

It was already dark outside—so dark that, as she turned quickly into the street, she almost ran into the figure of a man hanging about just outside the entrance. As she walked away she turned once to look back at the place that she was leaving forever.

At the window of the upper room, that was in darkness except for the firelight, the blind was still pulled a little way aside, and two eyes were peering down. Leila could picture that white face of fear behind that had startled her as her husband stood there, watching—for what?

Not the last time, after all, that she was to see that building from which a frightened face had peered. Scarcely a quarter of an hour later the woman was hurrying back down that dark, dingy street.

Fate was against her that night; her immediate plans had gone awry. She had reached her sister-in-law's house only to find that Elsa had gone five minutes before. On her way Leila had called at the railway station to leave her bag at the cloak-room; otherwise almost certainly she must have met Elsa as Mrs. Fenn brought the child home.

Those lost five minutes were to count for more than Leila Vail dreamed of.

Even before she neared the familiar building Leila became conscious of an unusual stir of excitement in the street. In the short space of time since her leaving it a little crowd had gathered at the entrance of the block of flats. Men and boys were running past her toward it; she heard the sound of raised voices.

Leila was within a dozen yards of the building before the cause of the excitement revealed itself to her. Abruptly her footsteps stopped dead; fingers of ice seemed to be closing round her heart. Under her dark veil her face was suddenly stricken white and appalled. She shrank back into the shadow of a doorway.

That figure being led out handcuffed between the two men in plain clothes, his face ghastly, his collar half ripped off as if in a struggle, was her husband. And just within the lighted entrance, in her sister-in-law's arms, she caught a glimpse of Elsa, the child terrified and crying.

What did it mean? In God's name, what could it mean?

At first the white-faced woman, shrinking back unnoticed on the outskirts of the crowd, though conscious of the voices near her, was too stunned to grasp what was being said.

Then sentences detached themselves from the vague medley of excited voices. A red-faced woman with a shawl over her head was explaining shrilly to a friend in the crowd:

"Wanted for the Southampton crime, he is—the murder of Mackenzie, the millionaire, you know. They say the 'tecs nabbed him just as he was leaving the flat—just going to bolt. He must have got wind somehow that they were after him."

Arrested for Mr. Mackenzie's murder! The words came like a blow in the face to the unnerved trembling woman who listened in the shadow. It seemed impossible, incredible—and yet—that crested cigar-case she had found in his possession!

James Mackenzie's murder—then this was what he had feared, that he had been traced, and was preparing to make a bolt for it—her husband! She understood the full horror of it now.

But not the final crowning horror. That came with the woman's next words:

"And they do say Solwith's wife's mixed up in it too—that she's the woman whose handkerchief was found in that empty room. They'll arrest her next, though they've missed her now!"

That woman's handkerchief found in the house in Southampton with the dead man—the white-faced shuddering woman remembered now that they had been her initials on that handkerchief. She, too, was in danger of arrest like her husband.

Almost overwhelmed, and half-swoon-

ing, Leila Vail drew further back into the dark entry. A mist of horror swam before her eyes.

To obey that first aching impulse of a mother's heart now to—rush forward and snatch Elsa to her arms, to comfort the frightened sobbing child—would mean her arrest as well, if this woman's words were true that she was suspected of complicity in the murder of the very man whose heiress she was! And perhaps she could not clear herself of suspicion, would have to stand in the dock.

It was as though a flaming sword had suddenly been interposed to cut her off from her child.

Fate against her whichever way she turned! No longer was it a question of mere expediency that she should sink utterly her connection with Hector Solwith, before she claimed that great fortune awaiting her—more, far more than that!

And if she were still to carry out those plans she had formed, she must carry them out alone: that realization forced itself upon the distraught woman's numbed brain. For so surely as she came forward, now or in the future, to acknowledge and claim Elsa, so would the grip of the law close inevitably upon her—heiress though she was to a million of money!

CHAPTER VIII.

MRS. TRENT IS EXPECTED.

IT is understood that Mrs. Trent, who succeeds to the late Mr. James Mackenzie's fortune, is expected to arrive in England to-morrow night.

This newspaper paragraph, with further details, Jack Barclay read at breakfast; and as he drove through London that morning he became aware that more than one of the Sunday papers had thought it a fact of sufficient importance to announce on their placards.

Again and again his eyes were caught by flaring contents-bills—that indirectly reminded this man, who had been brought

up to regard himself as James Mackenzie's heir, of his own disastrous luck.

That there was a widespread interest on the part of the public concerning the dead man's heiress was undoubtedly—an interest not entirely to be accounted for by the sensation that the Southampton murder case had excited.

What lent an added piquancy was the fact that this girl of twenty-five, who unexpectedly had come in for so enormous a fortune, had been lost sight of by all her friends until the repeated advertisements of the late Mr. Mackenzie's solicitors had drawn her from the obscurity in which she had hidden herself for nearly seven years.

It was the day before the dead man's only surviving relative, Olive Barnard as she had been when Barclay knew her years ago as a girl, was to return to England, where a fortune estimated at a million sterling awaited her.

Messrs. Bennett and Haig, the solicitors, had received a letter from a small town in the South of France, signed Olive Trent. The writer explained that before her marriage she had been the Olive Barnard for whom they were advertising; her husband was dead.

She had been suffering from bad health, but as soon as she felt well enough to undertake the journey she would return to England. Meanwhile, the writer had added, if Mr. Bennett, whom she had known years ago, cared to run over to see her for a personal interview, she could easily convince him of her identity.

Mr. Bennett, much as he hated the Channel crossing, had gone to see Mrs. Trent forthwith. Her letter, with certain intimate references to their past acquaintanceship, had left him practically assured that the writer was Olive Barnard; and James Mackenzie's heiress was a client whom it would be good policy to please.

Now, three weeks later, Mrs. Trent was expected to arrive in London on the following night.

Barclay's eyes fell on a cluster of newspaper bills outside a shop-door, as he

swung by in his car that Sunday morning, with Joan Wingate by his side.

"MRS. TR...T — MILLIONAIRESS"

stood out in heavy block type on one of them.

Just for a moment, as the words caught his eye, Joan saw a little bitter smile cross her lover's face, and her own eyes were suddenly sympathetic and tender. But the look passed almost as swiftly as it had come.

It had been hard luck for him, because he knew that James Mackenzie, after destroying his will in a moment of hot-headed anger, had repented almost as quickly; his telephone message from Southampton was proof. Only that blow from the dark, that had robbed Barclay of his best friend, had fallen before ever Mackenzie could repair that hasty act.

Well, it was no use grizzling: luck had been against him—it was up to him to show himself a good loser, that point of honor in the case of any man worth his salt. This girl Olive Barnard, or Mrs. Trent as she was now, who was the gainer by his loss—it was only human nature perhaps that his first thoughts of her had been tinged with a sense of bitterness and injury; but they were feelings that he had been man enough to brush aside almost at once. It was not as though she had sought or schemed to supplant him. And, after all, he had always felt it was unfair the way she had been made to suffer because of her father's sins.

Joan had reproached herself bitterly as the cause.

"But for me, Mr. Mackenzie would never have destroyed his will," she had cried. "Oh, Jack, I feel as though it was all my fault—"

But he would not let her finish.

"Your fault for being the one woman I wanted for my wife!" he had cried with a laugh—but his laugh was very tender. "After all, little girl, I am no worse off than I expected to be that afternoon when we defied his threats. I didn't care then

as long as I'd got you. If I want to be rich—why, it's only to give you all the good things of the world."

"But—haven't you given me the best thing of all in the world already?" she whispered softly, with shining eyes.

That afternoon in the chief's room at the dock, that last day of James Mackenzie's life, he had chosen—as Joan had chosen, too—between love and money. Well, if he had the choice offered him again, he would still choose as he had chosen then. For a moment Jack Barclay's eyes rested on the girl at his side—took in the soft curve of her cheek which the rush of air had kissed to a deeper color, the little wilful tendrils of wind-ruffled hair, all the sweetness and beauty of her. He would still choose as he had chosen then!

The weeks that had passed had drawn aside scarcely as much as a corner of the curtain that veiled so impenetrably the circumstances of James Mackenzie's death.

The one arrest that had been made, that of Solwith, had been due less to any success of the police efforts to unravel this sinister mystery than to chance. One of the passengers by the Illyria had returned from New York by the next boat—and on board was a man who reminded him curiously of the *soi-disant* Mackenzie of the passage out.

He had communicated with the authorities at Southampton, with the result that Solwith—who had assumed another name for the voyage home—had not been lost sight of from the moment of landing. After certain police inquiries he had been arrested at his flat that night.

For the rest the police had drawn blank. The chief actors in that grim drama, who had moved through its scenes like shadows on a darkened stage, were as shadows still. Not a clue had been forthcoming.

In broad daylight Mackenzie had vanished in a moment, as it were, from the world of men and women. What trap had been laid into which he had walked to find death lurking in ambush? Where

had he been, living or dead, during the intervening week before that untenanted house in Southampton had yielded up its secret?

If the dead man had left behind him a bewildering problem, it seemed as if he had carried the key to its solution with him into the eternal silence.

Big Ben was striking eleven as the car swept over Westminster Bridge; the river below was gray with mist in the April morning, and the streets on the south of the Thames looked even more drab than usual in the murky atmosphere. But presently, almost before the fringe of outer London was reached, the sun made a belated appearance, fitfully at first, then warmed to his work; and it was in a blaze of sunshine that they swept out into the open country.

In London that morning, as they drove through the mist-laden streets, it had been difficult to realize that spring was come. But here My Lady Greensleeves had been before them, and with the trailing of her mantle a froth of delicate green had broken out on the hedgerows; in the woods the bluebells had heard the whisper of spring, and on the slopes of the hills far away before them gleamed the gold of the gorse—the gorse that is never out of bloom save when kissing is out of fashion.

It was a day when it was good merely to be alive and in love—and when it was good for two lovers to know that a long day stretched before them.

The past few weeks had brought Jack Barclay the greatest sorrow he had known in James Mackenzie's death, a blow that had robbed him, too, of his prospective partnership in a wealthy firm, had left him dependent on his own efforts for a living—but his temperament was too buoyant to encourage painful thoughts or vain regrets on such a day as this, with the sun overhead and the spring about them, and by his side this girl he loved, with the youth in her eyes, who herself looked like the very incarnation of the spring.

They had brought a luncheon basket with them, and the swift rush of the car and the fresh air of morning had given each the keenest of appetites long before the destination they had set themselves was reached—the crest of the long chalk road winding up among the Surrey hills that gleamed in the sunlight ahead of them like a white trailing scarf.

"I think if the worst comes to the worst, and I have to clear out from the dock, I shall have to turn my hand to driving a taxi," he told her gaily as they unpacked the hamper, their heads very close together over it in the process. "Or perhaps get a job as a chauffeur. Joan, how would you like me to call for you on my weekly evening out and—what is the phrase?—'walk you out' in my chauffeur's livery?"

"But you won't have to leave the dock. You're too useful—you couldn't be spared. Besides, Mrs. Trent couldn't for shame do that," Joan cried.

"I wish I could think I was as indispensable as all that! Well, I suppose I shall know one way or another in a day or two. Not that I think there's much fear, from what old Bennett tells me."

Mr. Bennett, the solicitor, in his interview with the new owner of the dock, had on his own initiative told Mrs. Trent of young Barclay's hard case—of the proposed partnership, of the circumstances in which the millionaire had destroyed his will. Mrs. Trent had listened sympathetically enough, and had agreed with Mr. Bennett's expressed opinion that she might find Barclay a useful lieutenant at the dock.

Meanwhile, until her arrival in England, Barclay was to retain his position at the dock with a definite salary.

From what the solicitor had said, he was pretty confident that Mrs. Trent would offer him a good post there. His heart was in the work; he was proud of the traditions of Mackenzie's—he would be a fool to refuse, from any feeling of pique or pride, to take a position as employee where he had once expected to

be master. And he had no intention of refusing, should the offer come.

After lunch was over Barclay filled a pipe, and forgot that there were such things as disappointments in the world, as they lingered there among these hill-top solitudes enjoying the sunlight and the wind and talking gay, foolish nonsense.

Lovers are privileged to talk nonsense—and, after all, they had no audience but some sparrows that had scented the crumbs of the feast and a lark who was too pleased with his own singing to pay any attention to a couple of mere mortals.

"Well, we must be making a start, I suppose."

And reluctantly Jack knocked out the ashes of his second pipe and helped Joan into the car. It was a car that James Mackenzie had bought for him—a possession, as he reflected grimly, that seemed ludicrously out of keeping with his present altered circumstances.

They were not returning directly to London. Barclay had a visit to pay to an old house in the deeps of Surrey, that had been almost more his home than the great Georgian house in the Bloomsbury Square.

Les Hirondelles it was called, this old manor dreaming among its wooded grounds that had been Mackenzie's country house. In the winter months the millionaire had preferred London; but for the rest of the year he had lived for the most part at this pleasant retreat that was over twenty miles from London and at least four from a railway station—which mattered not at all in these days of motor cars.

Les Hirondelles, of course, passed with everything else to Mrs. Trent.

Barclay was driving over this afternoon to arrange for his remaining personal possessions there to be packed and sent to his rooms before the new owner's arrival. It was curious to feel, as he drove in at the tall iron gates and along the familiar winding avenue, that this old place was no longer his home, that he had no right here now.

It was a stately old house, quaint and rambling, dating back a couple of centuries at least, that broke into view through the thick growth of trees, where the rooks were making a great to-do over their building; its walls covered almost to the gabled roof with climbing roses and the knotted stems of wistaria that in the summer would be laden with heavy mauve clusters. Jack remembered how the roses had nodded outside the window of his bedroom and filled it with their fragrance on summer mornings.

There was a curious sense of unreality mingling with the pang of the thought that he would never sleep in that room again, as he pointed out the window to Joan, to know that this chapter of his life was closed.

It was the first time Joan had seen it; he had known she would fall in love with the old place, this house to which he had once dreamed of bringing her some day as his wife.

Just for an instant at that thought the good-humored face lost its buoyant smile, and his mouth seemed to grow hard. Yes, it was rough luck. A rankling sense of injury swept across him. What right had this Mrs. Trent to step in and rob him of what should have been his—what Mackenzie meant should be his? He had never quite realized till now how dear this old house that he had known from boyhood had become to him.

But he dragged himself out of the moment's bitterness, to respond gaily enough to the housekeeper's greeting as she opened the door to them.

"I've brought Miss Wingate to see you and the old place before I say good-by to it, Mrs. Dennis," he said, adding: "Only I'm glad that you aren't saying good-by to it, anyway!"

Mrs. Dennis was a pleasant featured motherly Scotswoman, who had grown old in Mr. Mackenzie's service. Her smile was a little tremulous to-day; she was feeling keenly the coming changes as well as the injustice to "Mr. Jack."

"But—it isna my place to say so,

maybe—but it isna fair or right, Mr. Jack!" she broke out emphatically—and Joan's heart went out to the old body for the touch of genuine feeling in her voice. "We all know that the master meant no one but you to have it. The place will never seem the same again."

She had received instructions from the solicitors to get the house ready for its new owner; it was probable that Mrs. Trent would make Les Hirondelles her residence.

They stood talking for a little while; then presently Mrs. Dennis drifted away kitchenward to get tea for them, and Jack took Joan over the house.

It was as quaint inside as out; a place of unexpected nooks and angles and winding corridors, with steps in the most unlikely places after the fashion of many old houses, as though it had been built on no settled plan, but had grown up quite haphazard—and altogether charming. More than once Joan stole a sympathetic glance at Jack, her own eyes very near to tears. And she felt that she hated this interloper who had supplanted Jack—illogically enough, perhaps; but the feeling was there.

She was very silent as they sat at tea, laid in the paneled hall, where a wood fire crackled cheerfully on the low hearth. She could not acquit herself of blame. If she had acted differently on the day of her interview with Mr. Mackenzie, if her own wounded pride at the millionaire's thought that she was a woman to be bought off had not prompted her act of retaliation, Joan was telling herself, perhaps he would not have destroyed his will, and Les Hirondelles would still have been Jack's. Oh, she blamed herself!

Jack, glancing across the table at Joan's face, read something of the thoughts passing through her mind and tried to rally a smile back to her lips. But he was not quite successful.

"Oh, Jack, it isn't fair—" she broke out suddenly, her lip quivering.

He stretched out a hand across the table and touched hers.

"Perhaps not, little girl—only we're not going to worry about it, are we?" he cried, smiling across at her. "And, since it wasn't to come to me—well, I'm glad Mrs. Trent's come in for it. She had rotten luck, too, you know, when her father—"

His voice broke off. Across the hall the bell of the telephone had rung. He crossed over and took down the receiver.

"Yes, this is Mrs. Trent's house, Les Hirondelles. Oh, Mrs. Trent isn't here—she's not expected in England until to-morrow night," Jack said. Somehow the voice speaking to him over the telephone was curiously familiar. "Who is speaking? Is it Curtis?"

"No; my name isn't Curtis," the voice came back. "No, I won't leave any message." And the conversation closed.

"I could have been sure it was Curtis speaking," Jack said to himself thoughtfully as he hung up the receiver. Then, as he was turning away from the telephone, a sudden exclamation of surprise broke from him.

Joan saw that he was staring through the window. Following his eyes, she saw a motor-car coming quickly up the drive to the house.

In the car, by the side of an elderly man, sat a woman, undeniably beautiful—but it was not her unusual beauty than left that first, almost startled impression on Joan's mind.

It was the face of a young woman—youth unmistakable in the clear, smooth skin, in the dark eyes—crowned by hair that was white as that of age.

"By Jove!" cried Barclay. "Mrs. Trent!"

CHAPTER IX.

SOME ONE AT THE TELEPHONE.

SO, in spite of the newspapers, Mrs. Trent was in England!

The elderly man by her side in the motor-car that was coming up the drive was Bennett, the lawyer; it was his car

that had brought down this unexpected visitor to Les Hirondelles.

Barclay's first swift impression of Olive Trent in that glimpse of her was that she had altered almost out of recognition.

The jet-black hair of the girl he remembered seven years ago was white now, except for occasional dark threads still lingering among its snowy profusion, that lent an almost startling contrast to the youthfulness of the face beneath—its smooth, clear skin, the dark eyes. He would hardly have known her again but that Bennett had spoken of the prematurely-white hair.

The lawyer caught sight of Barclay through the open window and hailed him as the car drew up.

"I've motored Mrs. Trent down from town," he said, as the younger man opened the door. "Piece of luck finding you here, Barclay—we were talking about you. You two don't need an introduction, I fancy?"

Mrs. Trent smiled as she stepped down from the car.

"Of course, I remember Mr. Barclay quite well," she said.

As he went forward to meet her Barclay had to revise that first impression. As he looked at her more closely, it was to realize with surprise how little Olive Trent had altered in face—that her unfamiliar look was chiefly the effect of the white hair; in some subtle way it seemed to alter her whole appearance.

"But this is rather a surprise, Mrs. Trent," Barclay said, as he touched her extended hand. "I understood you were not expected in England until to-morrow."

"I arrived last night," she explained. "It was—well, a little ruse that Mr. Bennett advised. I don't quite know why they should, but Mr. Bennett thought I might probably be worried by reporters on landing—"

"Oh, I expect they'll be waiting to make copy out of you to-morrow night at Dover!" Barclay said. "I was, of course, as much in the dark as they

when I motored over this afternoon with Miss Wingate, to take away some personal things of mine here."

"I am very glad not to have missed you. You know—" she spoke hesitatingly; a trace of constraint had crept into the lowered voice— "I feel as if you had more right here at Les Hirondelles than I. That you must look upon me as—as a usurper."

"Oh, you mustn't think that—or that I begrudge you your good fortune, Mrs. Trent," he said quickly. "Why should I? Of course, it was a bit of a facer for me—no use saying it wasn't. Only any feeling of bitterness I might have was quite impersonal."

Olive Trent looked at him for a moment without speaking. She liked Jack Barclay for the way he had taken his disappointment. Some men in his place, she felt, would have displayed a less generous attitude.

"But I hope we shall always be friends," she said. Then abruptly: "Now won't you introduce me to Miss Wingate?" turning to where Joan and the old lawyer stood talking.

She was interested in Joan Wingate—this girl who, as Mrs. Trent knew, had been the indirect means of costing Jack Barclay the fortune that had come to her. Perhaps Joan's manner, as they shook hands, was, in spite of herself, a little constrained. Her sense of bitterness on her lover's behalf had been stirred anew to-day with this glimpse of the stately old house that had been so long Jack's home—a bitterness against the circumstances that had robbed him of it, if not against this woman who was its mistress now. It was not easy to respond to the other's evident wish to be cordial.

Olive Trent's eyes wandered round the charming old-fashioned hall, and Joan saw that she drew a sudden, deep breath. It was almost like a home-coming this—as a child she had known the old house so well, before her mother's death and the gradual estrangement between James Mackenzie and her father.

Mrs. Dennis had been the housekeeper then as now; Olive Trent had pleasant memories of the old Scotswoman. And she shook hands warmly with her as Mrs. Dennis came to pay her respects to her new mistress.

The housekeeper brought in fresh tea. Jack and the lawyer talked, but Mrs. Trent seemed preoccupied. So many memories had been waiting for her here. Last night, on reaching England, she had gone to stay for a few days with the lawyer and his wife—but this was the first real link with those memories of her girlhood. It was like coming home after bitter exile. It had been that insistent feeling that made her pay this visit to Les Hirondelles to-day.

She was dressed in mourning, of course; Joan wondered if the black was on account of Mr. Mackenzie alone, or partly for her husband. Joan had heard that Mrs. Trent had lost her husband, comparatively recently.

"It seems she married in the States," the lawyer had told Jack, "and I understand that her married life has been spent in various parts of America. There is one child, a little girl of four—in America now with her husband's sister. She was too delicate to take the sea voyage when Mrs. Trent had to come to Europe lately on business of her late husband's. She spoke reticently—but I fancy it was not a very happy marriage."

It struck Joan that Olive Trent was not a very happy woman, in spite of this fortune that had come to her as from the clouds. Something in the preoccupied face, in her eyes, seemed to hint at that—restless eyes; Joan could almost have thought frightened eyes, though she could not have defined what suggested the odd impression. And she knew that Jack would have laughed at her and told her she was an imaginative person. But the impression lingered.

Mrs. Trent seemed to come out of her abstracted mood with a start as Barclay suddenly spoke to her across the tea-table.

"You know, Mrs. Trent, some one else is evidently in your secret—about your arrival in England, I mean," he said. "Half an hour ago some one was asking for you on the telephone here."

"But who could have known I was in England? Who was it?" she asked quickly.

"He wouldn't give his name or any message."

Barclay saw the little puzzled frown on her face deepen.

He and Joan did not stay long. As they rose to go, Mrs. Trent told Barclay that she proposed paying a visit to the dock on the following day.

"And it will give me an opportunity of discussing one or two business matters," she said, rather hesitatingly. She added in a lower voice: "I want to say how glad I was to know through Mr. Bennett that you are willing to remain at the dock. And I shall endeavor, of course, to make it worth your while."

Barclay repeated her words to Joan as they drove away from Les Hirondelles.

"I don't think I shall have to drive a taxi after all, Joan!" he told her. "I think Mrs. Trent means to make me a definite offer to-morrow. Curtis won't be overpleased, I fancy!" he added with a laugh. "I haven't a doubt, you know, that it was Curtis who wrote that anonymous letter to Mr. Mackenzie—hello, Saraden!"

A turn in the road had brought into sight the figure of a man walking toward them, who whistled to heel a couple of dogs as the car swept round the corner.

Barclay stopped the car, and Joan found herself shaking hands with a man in a particularly disreputable Norfolk jacket, with lazy, gray eyes and a half-humorous, half-cynical mouth that lent character to a rather ugly and undeniably prepossessing face. His voice Joan thought unexpectedly attractive, with its faintest touch of Irish brogue. His age might be anything between thirty and forty.

Joan had often heard of Max Saraden,

this friend of Jack's, who had a cottage in the neighborhood of Les Hirondelles, where he was more often to be found than at his bachelor quarters in town.

"Now you'll kindly turn your car, Barclay, and drive straight back to my cottage, where I'm going to give Miss Wingate some tea," Saraden exclaimed. "It was like a gift from the gods to a man fed up with his own company, when you appeared round the corner!"

His face fell at hearing that they had already had tea, and had to hurry back to London.

"It's too bad of you—when you were so near my place, not to have looked me up! You know, Miss Wingate, I ought to put you in my black books," he told her severely.

"Why?" she laughed.

"Faith, hasn't Jack neglected shamefully one of his friends at least ever since his engagement? And I shall only forgive you on one condition—"

"Please relieve my suspense!"

"That you promise to make Jack motor you over to dinner at my cottage the first night you can spare," Saraden said. "I want you and my sister to know each other. Ever since she heard of Jack's engagement—he's a favorite of hers—you have been an object of burning interest, you know, Miss Wingate."

"When the condition is such a pleasant one, of course I accept it," Joan told him smilingly. "It is very kind of you and Miss Saraden."

"We have just come from seeing an old friend of yours, Saraden," Barclay said. "Olive Barnard—Mrs. Trent now, of course. She came unexpectedly to England yesterday. We have just left her at Les Hirondelles."

"Jove, that's news!" Saraden looked interested. "Of course, I used to know her rather well. Jolly little kiddy she was," he said. "She was about eighteen when I saw her last—just before she chose to disappear from the knowledge of all her friends after her father's exposure and suicide. That was her pride, of

course — mistaken pride maybe, but it showed pluck. I expect I shall find her changed."

"I don't think she has altered in face much — but it's curious how her white hair seems, at first sight at any rate, to make her like another woman."

"Her mother's hair went white before she was thirty, I remember — so I was hardly surprised when Bennett spoke of it," Saraden said.

"Of course, I'm sorry for you, old chap—you know that—that Mackenzie died without a will. Only, but for you, I should feel jolly glad that Olive Barnard's had this big stroke of luck. She's had more than her share of undeserved bad luck, through her wrong'un of a father. Since I can't persuade you to come back with me, I think I shall walk as far as Les Hirondelles."

As Saraden walked up the drive of the manor house he found the lawyer pacing the lawn, smoking a cigar.

"Yes, Mrs. Trent's here. She's in the house — some one rang her up on the telephone a minute ago," the older man told him.

Saraden sauntered across the lawn toward the house. Through the open window he caught a glimpse of Mrs. Trent's profile as she stood at the telephone in the hall.

Barclay's words had prepared him for a change in the girl he had known so well — but it was something else that made that first swift arresting impression on Saraden.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK. Don't forget this magazine is issued weekly, and that you will get the continuation of this story without waiting a month.

Something in her white face, as she stood speaking into the receiver, quite unconscious of his approach.

Whatever the message that she had just heard over the telephone, it seemed to have brought a startled vivid fear to Olive Trent's eyes.

"Who are you?" Saraden heard her demand; her voice was shaken. "Who are you?" the woman at the telephone demanded again insistently.

The invisible speaker had refused to give his name or any clue to his identity — as earlier that afternoon he had refused it to Jack Barclay.

Olive Trent heard a faint laugh over the telephone that died away abruptly as the unknown speaker at the other end of the wire hung up the receiver. That white appalled look in her face communicated a little thrill to the watching man outside.

She must find out if possible who it was had telephoned that strange, disquieting message that she had just listened to — some one who had known what she had thought no one outside the lawyer's household knew, that she was already in England.

Feaverishly she spoke to central, asking for the telephone number of the man who had rung her up.

Presently the reply came:

"Not a subscriber's call; it came from a public call office."

Olive Trent's face was white as she turned, to see Saraden outside the window.

MUTATIONS

BY HAROLD SUSMAN

FIRST one and then another's eyes
Transform us in a trice;
A friend our virtue magnifies,
An enemy our vice!

The Pretty Woman

by
Owen Oliver

A "DIFFERENT" STORY

NOT mad? Hush! Hush! Sir, I throw myself upon your mercy. You have penetrated my secret. I am *not* mad; but for Heaven's sake don't tell the superintendent. He is a narrow-minded man; and inquisitive; tryingly inquisitive. Sometimes I fancy he suspects me.

You don't think so? What did he say about me? As mad as a March hare? Good, good! If he asks what I said to you, tell him that I gibbered like an idiot. An idiot! Ha, ha, ha! No! If I have any mental failing, it is not lack of intelligence, but the reverse. I am too clever. Cleverness is a net that you catch yourself in.

There's another net that catches the cleverest man. The snare of a woman! That was what caught *me!* Damn her! I—I—I am not mad; but sometimes I feel as if I shall be, if I don't get out to her!

What was I talking about? Oh, yes! The superintendent. You mustn't let him guess that I'm sane. If you did my last chance of escape would be gone. Better off here? Yes, yes! I know. I quite realize the position. If I escape and they find out that I am sane they will send me to prison.

I must take the risk. Foolish? Ah! It is not a question of expediency, but of right.

I have a duty to perform in the world; a plain duty. It's a painful duty, because she's a pretty woman; a very pretty woman. *Just to kill her!* I—I—Thank you. I will have a cigar. It soothes the nerves, as you say. Let's sit here in the sun, and I'll explain the matter. We'll wait till the superintendent has passed.

I'm going to gibber for his benefit. Ha, ha, ha! He, he, he! That's how I take him in! He's just what you might expect from an army officer. If you laid his brain open, you'd find that one hemisphere was regulations and the other prejudices. I don't blame him for being a fool; but he needn't show it by wearing a single eyeglass! This is an excellent cigar.

Now for the pretty woman. We won't have names. I'll call her just that. She had bright brown hair, and a bright little face, and a quick, bright smile, and a voice that seemed to laugh in words, and a saucy, red mouth, and mine burned for it! She was five and twenty and she had been married for three years, and she was visiting some friends without her husband. I was staying there, too. I was a clever man,

as I've said, but I wasn't clever about women.

At first I took her for a pretty grown-up child. She prattled to me so innocently. "I always thought a professor was dry and horrid," she told me, when I first took her in to dinner, "and I should be afraid of him! But you're not, and I'm not!" And then she smiled up in my face.

I'd never had a woman look at me like that before. She was so pretty. Oh, Heaven! She was *so* pretty! I fell in love with her, and she flirted with me.

I didn't know it was only flirting till I tried to kiss her. *She* knew. If she 'hadn't dreamed of such a thing,' as she said, I should have had the kiss, but she knew exactly what was coming; sprang away like a little cat, and got her hand to the bell. Then she turned round to me, panting, and let the bell go.

"No, no!" she said. "I won't do that. I couldn't be unkind to you. You have made a dreadful mistake. I hadn't dreamed of such a thing. I—I love my husband, and I don't do things like that, I am very, very silly, but I am not wicked! Oh, don't look like that. Don't, don't! You are so much older, and I never dreamed of such a thing. How could you?"

I think I *was* nearly mad for the moment. I raved at her; told her that she had deliberately led me on, and made me love her. She cried. Crocodile tears! Some women can!

"Oh!" she sobbed. "I have hurt you! I have hurt you! I didn't mean to. I thought you understood. You seemed like a big-brother friend. I was nice to you because I liked you in that way. I do like you that way."

"And I," I said, "love you!"

"But it's absurd," she declared. "You're so much older, and—"

"Absurd?" I cried. "Absurd?"

I was very near taking her little white throat in my big hands then! I wish I had. If I hadn't been so clever I should have. But I relied on my cleverness. I didn't want her dead. I wanted her alive.

If I *am* mad, I went mad then. No, you are quite right. I did not. If I had been mad I could not have formed my clever plan in those few seconds. I did more than form the plan. I began to play my part, put my hands to my face and groaned, and she cried more crocodile tears.

"No, no!" she said. "Not absurd; not at all absurd. It isn't because you're old. You're not *very* old." She said that like a coaxing baby. "If I weren't married, perhaps I shouldn't have thought you old at all, but I didn't ever think of it, and I mustn't, and I'm not going to. I do like you very, very much in a little-friend way. Will you be friends, please? I am so sorry, truly sorry. I am sure it was my fault too. I am a very thoughtless girl. My husband calls me 'little silly.' But I will be a very true friend."

She put her hand on my arm. I could show you exactly where. I seem to feel the touch ever since. I said we would be true friends. I asked for a kiss as "a consolation prize," and I got it. Don't tell me it was her innocence. She might be silly; but, if she wasn't a thorough flirt, she wouldn't have put her hands on my shoulders and kissed me back. And she did. She did!

Flirt or no flirt, she liked me. That was the one word of truth in all her lies. If I could get her husband out of the way, I knew that she would come to me. I decided to remove him.

If I had been mad, I should just have gone to the place where he lived and shot him, but I wasn't mad. I saw quite clearly that if I killed him I should be caught and sent to an asylum (I should have pretended to be mad, of course), and shouldn't get her, and besides she would be ashamed to marry me if I killed her husband. I decided that the first step was to separate them.

I made a clever plan for that; a very clever plan; but it had a flaw! I'll tell you about it presently.

The first thing was to teach her to trust me. I behaved very discreetly for the rest of the visit; took the line of the fatherly

friend. I knew it piqued her that I could be so "fatherly." She was always trying to draw me on. She would take my arm and smile at me, and run about to fetch things for me; "not because you're old, but because I'm so young," she would smile at me and say, "and because I love to do things for my friend!" Sometimes she'd look up at me and say, "You're not very unhappy now, are you?" And I would struggle with myself till my muscles felt like steel. "I am quite happy, little friend," I always told her, and then she used to draw a long breath and dab her eyes quickly.

If I had been a fool I might have been taken in, and have believed that she was just an innocent, grown-up child, who had hurt me by inadvertence and wished to make amends. But I wasn't a fool, and I saw through her. She wanted to gratify her vanity by bringing me to my knees. I am not going to kill her merely for revenge. It is a duty. Women like her are cancers in society. They must be removed.

I am ashamed to own it; but you are a man of insight, and you will be merciful to human weakness. There were times when I shirked the duty. She was so—so lovable. If she had repented of her cruel coquetry, even at the eleventh hour, I would have snatched the excuse to forgive her. If she was not utterly heartless, I told myself, she must feel that she had tortured me sufficiently and dismiss me, when her visit came to an end; but she wanted to play with me a little longer.

"Your friendship is much to me," she said on the last evening; "and I want to make mine much to you. If you will come and see me at home, I shall be so very glad. Will you come?"

She touched me with her hand. If I had not been a clever man I must have thought it was sheer kindness and compassion. She looked so innocent and sweet; so very sweet. That was another time when I was tempted to strangle her.

"I will come," I said, "my dear." I called her that in a fatherly way. It made

her eyes blink with anger; or perhaps it was disappointment. Sometimes I thought that if I took a kiss now she would not run to the bell! But I would not risk it. I wanted to make sure of her; quite sure. I would wait till she ran away from her husband. Then she would run to me!

I thought too much of myself, and too little of my duty. This is my punishment. You would make some excuse for me, if you saw her. She looks so sweet and lovely.

Well, she went. I kissed her forehead, just where the bright brown hair stopped, at parting; and she squeezed my hand in both hers.

"God bless you," she whispered, "dear friend, and make you happy. I shall pray it in my prayers!"

Her *prayers!* That was when I condemned her finally. There is pardon, I often think, for all the sins that one sets out as sins; but none for the sins that are cloaked by hypocrisy. I did not cloak mine. I prayed to play with her heart as she played with this broken, broken heart of mine. Do you know, I sometimes think I *am* mad! Yet it was clever, my plan. It may seem far-fetched to you, but it would have succeeded, except for one trifling flaw. No, I won't tell you the plan yet. You will see it as I go along.

I went to the town where she lived, about a month later. I was there for four days before I called. I had let her see me in the distance two or three times. That was part of the plan. I made a good many inquiries about her husband. He had what some one called "a sporting past"; but people thought well of him now. He was a long, lean, strong-featured young man; "a hard-headed chap," they said, "except about his wife." He obviously worshiped her. I did not wonder that she had taken him in, for she had done it with me, and with most of the townsfolk.

"A thoughtless little person," they said, in effect, "but good and affectionate. She looks as if she flirted a bit, but she doesn't mean anything; and she can't help being such a little beauty."

On the fifth day I called. She was tearfully petulant at my neglectful delay.

"Now I don't believe I am your best friend," she said. "I mean you don't think so!"

She pouted like a baby.

"My dear," I said, in my most fatherly way, "I could not like you so much, 'loved I not honor more.'"

"Oh!" she cried. "Oh! Don't talk of that. I thought you would forget those things, and—"

"Tut, tut!" I interrupted. "I don't mean that, little goose!" I patted her hair—the bright brown hair—"I wasn't afraid to see my little friend, although—Never mind about that. I meant that duty had a prior call for the moment."

"You say 'duty'!" She tossed her pretty head. "I suppose you mean nasty business? Business! Ugh! If money is more than friendship—"

"It wasn't money, Bessie," I declared; "and it wasn't friendship. There is none to compete with yours. I will prove my trust in your friendship, by telling you the story. I would not tell it to any other on earth."

"I won't tell a soul!" she volunteered eagerly; "not a soul. Not Jack, even!"

She was alight with curiosity, and her eyes sparkled.

"I trust you," I said. "You are transparently honest, my dear." I had a curious impulse to kill her when I said that. If only I had! "Let me make the story brief, because it hurts me to tell it. Years ago I had a sister. She married a man. Well, she thought so. The marriage was a sham."

"Oh!" she cried. "Oh-h-h!" She began dabbing at her eyes. The crocodile tears were always at her command.

"He took her away—never mind where. He defrauded his employers and had to fly. She fled with him; worked her poor fingers to the bone sewing for their bread. Sometimes he earned a little butter; by cheating at cards and even theft. There's a long history of robbery; robbery of those who befriended him. She was

ignorant of his doings for a time. Then she learned the truth about him. Then he killed her!"

"Oh!" she cried. "Oh!"

"Killed her as she lay by his side at night; fled away before the morning, and has remained undiscovered for six years. For six years I have been tracking him. I have reason to think that he is in this town of yours."

"Oh!" she said again. "Oh! You must not do anything violent, dear friend. The law will punish him. I don't want my friend to get into trouble."

She stroked my coat sleeve gently.

"Yes, dear," I said, "Yes. I will hand him over to the law when I find him."

"Won't the police do that," she suggested, "if you tell them?"

"I don't know the name that he goes under," I said. "A friend of mine saw him here, and told me. I have been hoping to see him, but I haven't met him yet. Perhaps you might know him. He would be a few years over thirty; very tall and thin; at least he used to be thin. He may have filled out. He has a big nose, and dark eyes and hair. He used to sway a little as he walked. He was slow-spoken, but he rather surprised you by the way he always went to the point. Do you know any one here like that?"

She shook her head. The bright brown hair always seemed to glitter when she did so.

"I don't believe I should ever recognize any one from a description," she apologized. "If you hadn't told me who the man was, I should have thought you meant my husband!"

"Ah!" I said. "You told me he was a fine big man! I must make his acquaintance, when I've settled this business. If he's on the lines of this man externally, I congratulate him, and you! Burton—that was his real name, but he's gone by many others—was an attractive scoundrel in looks; in more than looks. He had a very fine voice; a light barytone. He was particularly good at oratorio music." I laughed bitterly.

"Oratorio music?" she repeated slowly. Her lips moved restlessly I noted, and there was a startled look in her eyes. I had seen in the local paper that her husband took the barytone solos for the town choral society.

"For the matter of that," I said, "he could sing anything. I believe he once traveled with a comic opera company."

"Indeed!" Her lips were trembling violently now. I had learned that her husband was in comic opera in his carefree youth.

"He was a good French scholar too," I remarked; and this also I had learned of him.

"A good French scholar," she murmured. "I—I—" She was evidently struggling with herself. "I am stupid at French," she said desperately.

"Ah!" I protested. "You aren't so stupid as you make out, my dear! You are quite a clever little lady. Well, to continue with my story, Burton got away six years ago; and ever since I have been trying to track him, without success. I was within twenty-four hours of him once. I had traced him to a mining camp. They called it the Gray Hill Settlement. You don't look well to-day."

She swayed a little in her chair.

"I feel the heat," she said in a husky little voice. "I—feel—the—heat."

"I am afraid that my story worries you," I apologized. "You are too tender-hearted, my dear. Shall I stop?"

"No, no! Go on! I am all right. Go on!"

"He went by the name of Holbrook there, and— You are *not* well, my dear. I am sure you are not."

"But I am. It is just a passing faintness. It is gone now. Go on! I am so interested."

She pulled herself together and smiled. I was glad to see that she could smile, for I took it as a sign that she did not really love her husband. If she had, I reasoned, she must have fainted. For the mining camp was where he had spent two years of his "sporting past"; and the name he

gave then was Holbrook. Oh, no! There was nothing against him, except a young man's wildness; nothing at all!

"I don't know if it was chance, or if the detective who was assisting me was in league with him and sent warning," I continued; "but he left the camp by the Tuesday train, as I arrived on the Wednesday. The reason they suggested for his hasty departure was that he feared they might lynch him on account of a curious run of luck at cards; but as a matter of fact, they meant to catch him in the act first, and they hadn't succeeded yet, though they felt 'morally sure' that he did cheat. They may have been in league with him, too, and have made up the story to deceive me. Anyhow, I missed him for six years.

"As you say, it's hard to identify a man by a description; but there's a good identification mark if I can catch him. He has a ship tattooed on his right forearm, a kind of Chinese junk, and a flowery circle round it. My sister— My dear, I am *sure* you are faint! You really must see a doctor. Shall I ring for some water?"

"I am not—very—faint," she denied. Her face was ashen. "It is—it is only my heart—I think."

"Oh, my *dear!*" I cried. "Don't say that!"

"There is nothing wrong really," she protested. "Don't—don't worry, my—my dear friend. Ring, will you? We will have some tea. That will set me right. Oh, you've brought the tea, Mary! Thank you. It's one lump of sugar and the tiniest drop of milk, isn't it? You see, I remember. It is such a sad story. So dreadful!"

"So dreadful!" I assented.

I said no more for some time; neither did she. She kept shivering; tried to keep still by holding the arms of her chair.

"I must come in and meet your husband," I proposed presently. "Do you expect him soon?"

"No, no!" she said quickly. "Not soon. I think he will be quite late. Are

you sure that he murdered your sister? The man you are looking for?"

"Quite sure, my dear; but we won't talk of it any more. I didn't know that you weren't well, or I wouldn't have worried you."

"I—I am *not* well," she cried. Her voice was almost a wail. "I suppose there was a quarrel, and he struck a hasty blow, and didn't mean to—to—"

"My dear," I answered, "there was no quarrel and no haste. I often wonder whether she anticipated anything of the sort. I pray and pray that she did not; but sometimes I picture her lying beside him night after night, afraid to sleep, fearing every movement. No, no! She could not have done it. She must have run away and come to me, if she had suspected that. She *must* have run away, don't you think?"

"Yes!" she cried. "Yes!"

Her voice was almost a scream, and I rose to go. My clever plan had succeeded, I told myself. She believed the story, and she would run away before her husband came home that night. One little hint where to run, and the mine was laid.

"If she had only come to *me!*" I remarked, as I held the pretty woman's hand for good-by. "I should have guarded her from him. She was the dearest of all women to me, until— But we have forgotten all that. Forgive me. When I see you ill it makes me want to—to comfort you. If ever you need help— But of course you would come to me. I shall be in town to-morrow afternoon, at my office; but I shall see you soon. Good-by, my dear."

"Good-by," she said. "Dear, dear friend, good-by!"

She clung to my hand for some time. I think she was half inclined to ask me to take her away then; but presently she released my fingers.

"I shall see you soon," she said—"very soon!"

"Very soon!" I echoed as I went. I smiled as I walked along. She would

come to my office the very next afternoon, I predicted, and I should keep her! I smiled and smiled at the thought. She was such a pretty creature!

I had no doubt that she would come to me, or that she would let me take her away; but a day was long to wait, and it seemed surer to take her that night. If I could meet her on her flight, when she was wild with fear, and saw her husband in every shadow—when she wanted a strong arm to protect her—she would fall readily into mine.

She would come with me more readily than to-morrow, when she had had time to think of other friends. She would not betray her husband to me, and she could not conceal her desire to escape from him. So she would probably say that she was flying from him because she loved me—and with my arm round her she would—and I would offer to put the seas between them. Yes, I must meet her on her flight.

I made sure that she was going that night. I will not bore you with details of my inquiries. They really were made very cleverly. I found that she was packing trunks, and gave out that she was called away to a sick cousin. She was going by the seven twenty-two.

She went by it; so did I. I lurked at the far end of the platform till I saw her. Then I got into the train. Twenty minutes after we had started I walked along the corridor.

I found her in a compartment, alone except for one man. He was her husband, and she was clinging to his hand! You may think I was mad to do what I did. Perhaps I was. God in heaven! Hadn't I cause to be?

But I could not have been mad, for I reasoned the whole business out in three seconds; constructed what had happened, just as it was told at the trial. She had not told him of my accusation, but had declared that her nerves were upset, and she would be ill if he didn't take her away that very night; and he had humored her, as he always did.

She believed him a thief, a cheat, and a murderer; believed that her own life was in danger from him. She denied that at the trial, but she lied! And she cared only to save him from me. She did not love me at all; and she loved her husband. I did not think of that. It was the one flaw in a very clever plan!

There was an error in the charge that they made against me at the trial. I did not shoot at him, but at *her*. That was my second great mistake. She thought I should aim at him, and sprang in front of his great body. The bullet went exactly where the bright brown hair had been a moment before.

If I had wanted to shoot *him*, I could have done it before he was on me; but I tried to get round him to shoot her, and he had me down and twisted the revolver from my hand. My face was cut and bleeding, and he had dislocated my wrist; but she didn't think of me, only of him.

"He is mad," she cried to the people who gathered round. "He is mad! If he says things about my husband, don't believe them! Don't believe them!"

I jeered at her then.

"There is no one in the world who would be fool enough to believe such things of your husband, *except you!*"

"Oh!" she cried. "Oh, thank God! *Thank God! It's not true!*"

Then she fainted, and he caught her in his arms. I often picture her like that. It is how she will look when I have killed her. Her hair had come loose. It looked so beautiful hanging down; her bright brown hair—when I have killed her I shall take a piece of it.

Do you know, I wavered in my intention of killing her even then, until the trial. She loved her husband; she had flirted heartlessly with me. They were crimes, but I wondered if they were quite unforgivable crimes. Heaven, I think, forgives a deal; and who was I to judge? Well, at the trial she committed the crime that is not to be forgiven here or hereafter—the crime of hypocrisy. She pretended to plead for me.

"I was to blame," she said, with the tears running down her cheeks—she held them at call, as I have said. "I was so foolishly careless. I loved my husband, and I never dreamed of flirting; and I never thought that any one could think it of me.

"But I ought to have seen how he felt about me, and afterward I ought to have gone away. It was my thoughtlessness that led him to do this. He is a good man really—a kind, good man. He just went mad for a moment. I'm sure he wouldn't do it again. I *do* feel I am to blame; but I meant it for the best. I—I tried to be kind!"

"My dear lady," the judge said, as if he soothed a child, "I don't believe there is a person in the court who thinks badly of you!"

"Yes!" I shouted. "There is one!"

They regarded that as conclusive evidence of my insanity, I think. She deceived them all—all!—as she had once deceived me.

The jury added a rider to their finding. "We wish to record that we consider Mrs. Markham's conduct in the matter irreproachable."

My counsel added a crowning insult.

"It was my duty to my unfortunate client to put certain questions to Mrs. Markham," he said; "but I hope these cannot be construed as any reflection upon her. I entirely agree with the jury's rider, and consider that the fact that my client so misunderstood her kindness is a further proof that he was not responsible for his actions, and should not suffer any punishment other than detention in a comfortable asylum, where his friends are prepared to place him. I earnestly urge that the sentence may take that form."

I tried to reach him; but the warders were too strong for me. When I escape perhaps I shall kill him, too, but I shall not let private revenge interfere with my public duty. It is a painful duty, a very painful duty. She is *such* a pretty woman!

Rajah of Hell Island

by H. Bedford-Jones

Author of "Nuala O'Malley," "Malay Gold," "The Ghost Hills," etc.

THIS is the history of a brave American mate and a foolhardy American girl who saw no guile in the invitation of a Malay Sultan to her to found a mission station at his chief city. There is no need to tell you it is worth reading if you have ever read anything by Mr. Bedford-Jones.—THE EDITOR.

CHAPTER I.

A FAIR PASSENGER.

THE Penang crawled wearily and noisily up the sea; the day blazed crimson and then ended in purpled twilight, and the wine-dark waves were etched in faint phosphor. Stone, standing beside the quartermaster at the wheel, swore softly.

"That damned load of rails has shifted—feel her list to port?"

"Yes, *tuan*," replied the Malay quartermaster simply.

"Steel rails for the Sultan's railroad—well, I didn't stow 'em. Half point off!"

"Yes, *tuan*." The Malay shifted the wheel slightly.

Some time in the blackness of that night, they entered and left a port—a tangle of trees and platforms and concealed godowns on the bank, with flaring torches and shouting Malays, a stink of blended evils, vague shadows along the river-mouth. Not until they were stand-

ing out again did Stone learn that a passenger had come aboard.

"Skipper's happy now." Mickelson, second mate, was a burly brute and affected a coarseness which was working into his soul. His face looked like the face of the carven monsters on the Japore joss-house. "Got a woman and arrack. White woman."

"Eh?" Stone stared at him. "That one of your lies?"

"Go see!" Mickelson chuckled evilly. "He's got the arrack now, and will have the woman later. Before she gets to the Sultan, at least. She's going up to join his harem. Dancer, she is! Out of a troupe stranded at Singapore last month. Go see."

"Beast," muttered Stone, and stumbled off the bridge, his watch over.

He reflected, however, that Mickelson, although in general a filthy liar, might in this instance be telling the truth. No white woman could have any business, except of an Oriental nature, with the crafty

Sultan of Kuala Gajah—crafty Sultan Lumpur, who had been initiated by Montmartre and the hoydens of Bucharest into European vice, and who knew the vice of Asia by natural heritage.

No white woman, except under dire necessity, would have taken passage on the Penang—the dirty old coasting-wallah which was Sultan Lumpur's navy, supply barge, and pet pride. Certainly she was no one else's pride, unless that of Captain Benbow, who would never again hold a ticket from any civilized board of trade.

Stone picked his way aft, cursing the necessity which had forced him to sign on at the Straits. The Penang was a floating horror of smells, right enough. The rank stench of opium pointed to her Chinese passengers; then she boasted some holy pilgrims returning home after two years on the Mecca pilgrimage; her cargo was a fearful mess of odds and ends, from petrol for Sultan Lumpur's automobile to steel rails and a consignment of rotten, wormy copra which was being returned to the Sultan by an impolite agent who could not be bribed to accept it.

"It's no ship for a white woman," growled Stone. "Not even for a busted dancer selling her soul to Lumpur! And it's no ship for me once I can get out of her."

He coughed and cursed through a group of natives squatting in a circle and smoking vile Chinese tobacco. Then, at the companion, he heard the skipper's voice and halted.

"Take this to Mr. Mickelson with—with my compliments." Captain Benbow stood somewhere in the darkness farther aft, and was talking to Tan Tock, the steward. "Give this other bottle to that—hic!—that fool, Stone."

"Yes, *tuan*," murmured the soft voice of Tan Tock. Stone realized that Benbow was sending arrack to the bridge. In disgust he was turning down the ladder when the captain's voice once more caused him to pause.

"And—and—listen, Tan Tock! Where's that woman passenger? Speak

up, ye yellow imp! I told ye to place—hic!—to place her in my cabin—and—and she's not there—"

"*Tuan*, she said there had been some mistake," explained Tan Tock. "So I left her in the Sultan's cabin, *tuan*."

A volley of amazed oaths broke from the skipper. Stone, frowning in black anger, slid swiftly down the companion. There was something very strange in this passenger business, he reflected. Mickelson had probably lied out of sheer deviltry, about the woman; not about Captain Benbow, however. Even now Benbow was well upon the drunken road, for arrack is swift and deadly.

"Something queer about it," muttered Stone, "if Tan Tock flinched at obeying the brute's order! The woman was wise, too. H-m! Let's see her."

He paused and knocked at the door of the Sultan's private and reserved cabin. A quiet, womanly voice answered him.

"Well? Who is it?"

"Mr. Stone, ma'am. Mate of this packet. I'd like to see you a moment, please."

Stone had expected argument and expostulation. To his surprise, a bolt was shot back at once, and the door swung open. He caught off his cap, staring silently. He was shocked by the greatness of Mickelson's lie.

"May I come in, please? There are—reasons—"

"Certainly, Mr. Stone."

Once inside, he shut the door behind him, shot the bolt, and also snapped home the Yale lock used by the cautious Sultan. Benbow would soon be along, he reflected.

He turned and looked again at the woman, trying to find words. She was pale and slender; frail, but with stout-hearted courage in her eyes. Gray eyes they were, like his own. And she was not at all beautiful. Stone found himself wondering how, without beauty, her features could hold so much character, so much compellant friendliness—

"I beg your pardon," he said awkwardly. "Do not be afraid."

"I am not afraid." When she smiled, it seemed as though a warm, desperate beauty flitted over her face. Her gaze dwelt upon Stone's yellow curls, crept down across his brown features, lingered an instant upon his rather harsh mouth and chin, and seemed to be forced away from sight of his wide shoulders. Stone remembered only now that the heat had stripped him to his undershirt. His cheeks reddened darkly.

"I am not afraid, thanks. Did you want to see my ticket? They told me—"

"Do you know where you're going?" he snapped.

"Of course! To Kuala Gajah."

"For Heaven's sake—*Why?*"

"You have named it. The Sultan wrote us that he would help if we opened a mission station there. He said this boat, the Penang, would pick me up—"

Stone nodded, afraid to speak. This woman had come down on a coaster, to be picked up by Benbow and taken on to Kuala Gajah—to open a mission station at the hell-hole of the east coast of the Malay States! And Sultan Lumpur, the crafty spider, had started it!

"You're a missionary, then?"

"This is to be my first effort. There are white men there, of course?"

"Yes," responded Stone absently. "Some on this boat, too." Inwardly he was assuring himself that all mission managers were fools. What fool had sent this woman to Kuala Gajah?

"See here," he broke out, "it's none of my business, I suppose, but you're in a—a bad mess. This Sultan isn't going to help you or any one else. He's a fox! He wrote that letter in order to get you or some other white woman up to Kuala Gajah. You may as well face facts, miss. The captain of this boat is a rotter—there, I expect that's his gentle touch now. Keep quiet, please!"

The woman kept quiet, as he ordered. Her eyes fastened upon him.

A hand rattled the door, a foot shoved against it, a sullen curse followed. Then a fist banged against the panels, with more

curses. The door was made of teak, and the drunken Benbow might as well have assaulted the pearly gates.

"All right. He's ambled off for another drink," said Stone, when the pounding had ceased. "You'd better keep the door locked, in case he comes back. You're determined to go on, of course; it stands out in your eyes. Who are you? Why are you here?"

He was forceful, not far short of brutal. She, who had not flinched from the oaths and blows at the door, colored faintly beneath his frowning gaze until her face was the delicate pink of Red Sea corals.

"There's very little to tell, Mr. Stone. I was sent out here to do this work, and of course I intend to do it. It's very good of you to warn me. My name is Agnes Bretton."

"And you're an American. Well, I'll not deny it's good to see an American girl again, Miss Bretton; you see, I'm from Maine State myself. Came out here sailing, went into trading, went back to sailing again after going broke. So I know the coast, and I know you're up against it. We reach Kuala Gajah tomorrow noon. If you need help, call on me. Good night! Keep your door locked."

"Good night, Mr. Stone. And—and—thank you *so much!*"

The Penang grunted into an oily sea before dawn, and two hours after dawn she was staggering into a sweet blow from the north. Then the wind hauled around to the east, and before noon promised to put a heavy crimp in the navy and finances of Sultan Lumpur.

The skipper was snoring with an empty arrack bottle in his fist. Mickelson had battened the passengers below and was striving desperately to retrieve his worthless job of cargo-stowing, for with each roll of the ship two hundred rusty, steel rails went banging and slamming into her rusty, steel plates.

Stone had the bridge. It was not his fault that the old engines were half impotent, and that the ancient tramp missed

connections and went rolling up a gulf where she had no earthly or waterly business to be transacting. In fact, when the port bow plates began to loosen and drop from their rusty rivets, he thanked fortune that she was driving up into the Godung river-mouth instead of being flung on a lee shore.

In the midst of all this Agnes Bretton, ulstered against the spray, came up to the bridge. There was none to stay her, except Stone; he sent the quartermaster for hot coffee and took the wheel himself until the brown man returned.

"You're a good sailor, Miss Bretton," he observed smilingly. "All well below?"

"Yes, thank you. Are we nearly at Kuala Gajah?"

"No. We're not going there—not at all. That is, the Penang isn't. If we get to the head of this bight without founders, we'll lay up the ship for repairs."

"Oh, there's a town there?"

"A city. One of the biggest in this part of the world. I figure on laying the hooker up against a wharf of solid stone two hundred yards long."

"Oh! What city is it?"

"I don't know." Stone smiled grimly. "No one knows. It's on an island, and it's been deserted for hundreds of years—perhaps thousands. It's one of the immense ancient cities you'll find in this part of the world, ruins of a forgotten civilization."

"And no one lives there at all?"

"No one lives within a hundred miles of it, except Malays and Dyak fishermen."

The quartermaster clambered up with a canister of coffee and two pannikins. Stone retired to the cushioned pilot seat with Miss Bretton and devoted himself to breakfast, while the Penang pounded and slashed and rolled along, with a decided list to port.

"You're not a common sailor, Mr. Stone." The girl looked suddenly at him, a glow creeping into her cheeks under the sting of the coffee. "Am I not right?"

"You are always right, Miss Bretton; I am not a common sailor, because I have a mate's ticket."

Her lips came firmly together, but she did not press the subject. Stone was just lighting his pipe when Mickelson came up the ladder. Even beneath his bristly stubble of beard, the second officer's face showed fright. Nor did Mickelson pay heed to the figure that sat beside Stone.

"We're gone, Stone!" he cried out, slamming the lee door and standing there with fear in his eyes. "Half her damned plates have cut loose—"

"Steam pumps going?"

"Sure. But we're takin' three for every two feet they pump out. Can't get a man into the hold to secure those cursed rails. The chinks an' pilgrims are raisin' hell down below. Like the old Huzur when she took that reef up beyond Jeddah. Reg'lar hell!"

"How long will she last?"

"An hour, at most."

Stone puffed at his pipe, and squinted ahead.

"All right," he nodded quietly. "Go lock the skipper in his cabin—we can't have that drunken swine giving fool orders out here. Then get the boats ready."

Mickelson stared at him, and grunted an oath. The burly second was no coward.

"Boats won't hold the half of 'em."

"I don't expect 'em to. You know that island city—the ruins? They're four miles from shore, up the lagoon; and they're also ten miles from here. We can't make the island in an hour, Mickelson, but we can make the bar, two miles from the island. I'll run her nose into the bar, and you take a load of pilgrims to the island; then come back here and get the rest of us."

"Lord! You're a cool 'un!" ejaculated Mickelson admiringly. "You know damned well this sea will break her back in ten minutes—"

"Don't swear. There's a lady pres-

ent," snapped Stone. "Get the boats ready."

Mickelson looked at Miss Bretton, and grinned suddenly. His little pig-eyes lighted up with a most unholy gleam.

"Oh, beg pardon!" he exclaimed with an oily smirk. "I'll take you in my own boat, miss. It'll be a pleasure—"

Stone laid aside his pipe.

"Mickelson, it looks to me as though Providence had taken the cleansing of this packet into its own hands. I'm going to give Providence a bit of assistance if you don't watch out! Go get the boats ready and let out enough pilgrims for your first load. Send me up another quartermaster, too."

The two men looked steadily at each other for a moment, while the old ship groaned and bucked like a crazy thing. Mickelson's hand hovered close to a bulging coat-pocket, but his canny Scot's brain was clear enough to sense infinite danger from this commanding American. The second officer turned and departed, stifling a curse.

"Have you a revolver?" Stone turned to the girl beside him.

"I? Of course not." A smile etched her lips as she met his eyes. "Why?"

"Because there's going to be rough water ahead. Have you any imagination? Then picture an island that is one solid mass of ruinous stone-work, mostly covered by jungle, and upon this island a hundred-odd castaways, three of them white men and one a white woman—yourself. There will be ructions."

"I fail to see why," she returned, a faint frown rippling her brow.

Stone merely smiled grimly, and rose as the quartermaster sent up by Mickelson came into view. He was a lean, brown, salty Malay, and faced Stone with a steady eye.

"I am here, *tuan*."

"Good. Are you armed?"

"A knife, *tuan*."

"Here's a gun." Stone passed him the weapon. "Allow no one to enter this house—*no* one! You understand?"

"*Tuan*, Tan Tock the steward is on his way here now."

"If any one sets foot inside that door until I return, shoot."

"Very well, *tuan*."

Stone glanced at Miss Bretton. She said nothing, but her eyes followed him as if in puzzled wondering. He passed out to the ladder, thinking within himself that she seemed more girl than woman—a frail girl in a strange world.

Tan Tock was at the foot of the ladder, and stood aside as Stone went sliding down. He was a small man, this steward, bred between Chinese and Malay; because he had given Agnes Bretton the Sultan's cabin on the previous night, Stone liked him.

"You were seeking me, Tan Tock?"

"No, *tuan*. The lady, the white lady, is gone!"

"She is up in the bridge-house. Go and get your things together and meet me here, for we must take to the boats. The ship's sinking."

The steward's interest in the passenger did not seem odd to Stone at the moment.

As he made his way aft the American saw that Mickelson was not doing badly. The boats were being slung out and provisioned. A given number of pilgrims were being brought on deck, not without bloodshed, as the battened-down hatches were charged by those who remained; long howls of anguished fear pealed through the whole ship.

It was plain now to all on board that the Penang was doomed. She was listed to port, and she was also down by the head. Fortunately for Stone's plan, however, the fires would not be drowned yet a while, and she had a chance to reach the bar.

Getting aft, Stone found that Mickelson had not locked the skipper's door. He entered, found Benbow still stretched out in his bunk, and went through the captain's desk thoroughly. He emerged with the ship's papers and two revolvers, and visited his own cabin, also that of Mickelson. When at last he clawed his

way forward to the bridge again he had four revolvers, plenty of cartridges, and a small but comprehensive supply of medicines. He found Tan Tock waiting outside the bridge-house with a crammed duffel-bag.

"Good boy, Tan Tock! I'll take your bag inside. You go down to my cabin, get my bag, and fill it with stores from the Sultan's private locker. No liquor—tinned goods. Savvy? Get out a case of his mineral water, too."

The steward nodded and made off. Stone turned into the bridge-house, and found Miss Bretton talking with the two quartermasters, trying vainly to understand their lingo.

"Now, Miss Bretton," said Stone as he went to the wheel, "you may do your share. If we pull through alive it will be a miracle, so pray for the miracle. Catch on, boys!"

The two Malays tailed on beside Stone, swung the bucking, frantic wheel around, and with it the head of the ship. Shrieking in every rivet, the old Penang began to quarter the seas and slowly drove toward the bar; she rolled less, for she was low in the water and impassive as a dead thing to the blows of the seas that battered her plates.

As Stone pointed out to Miss Bretton, once he had the ship on her new course, the only hope was the one he had chosen. Ahead was the opening into the lagoon which held the island-city—a wide lagoon, but well sheltered from the storm—and it was choked by the bar silted down by the Godung River, whose mouth lay miles away across the lagoon. To right and left were keys of low ground, no more than mangrove marshes, which would afford no landing places were he to beach the ship elsewhere.

"The island affords the one place of refuge," he concluded. "Especially as our boats will only take on half our crowd. I've never been there, but I've heard of it."

There seemed little of promise in that dark, low, storm-lashed mangrove coast.

But Stone held the Penang steadily in, and when the lagoon entrance loomed close, Mickelson appeared with word that all was ready.

"All right—take charge!" cried Stone, driving his voice to the second officer. "Tell your engineer to shut 'em off when we strike. Break out the skipper and take him ashore with you."

Mickelson nodded and departed. Stone turned to his two quartermasters.

"I'll handle her now, boys. You go down and watch the hatches when we strike. When Tuan Mickelson gets all the boats away, open up the hatches, but keep the crowd aft. Go!"

Stone rang for half-speed. The Penang lumbered on, threatening to founder at each burst of water over her bows; from the decks below came a storm of voices as Mickelson and the Malay crew got the boats and loads in readiness. There was a moment of tense silence—then a sudden shock that flung Miss Bretton headlong forward. Stone caught her and for an instant held her tightly, clinging with one hand to the helm.

"All right," he said quietly, releasing her. "We're on the bar. If we're not pounded to pieces before the boats get back we're safe enough. Better see about getting your things together—wait, I'll go with you."

CHAPTER II.

ISLE OF JEHANNUM.

RIICHARD STONE had nothing in his past to shame his future. That he was no common sailor was true, in the sense that he had an education; he had gone to sea in the expectation of eventually managing his father's shipping business. But his father and the business had gone to wreck together on the shoals of a friend's note, duly indorsed, and the crash found Stone in Sydney, his only asset a mate's license in steam.

From Sydney he had worked north, with nothing in particular turning up,

gaing a little reputation as a hard Yankee mate and ever looking out for some chance at fortune. Except for his Yankee conscience, Stone might have picked up many shekels.

When he had placed Agnes Bretton in her cabin to pack her necessities he returned to the deck. Mickelson had gotten safely away with all the boats, and was heading north across the comparatively quiet lagoon toward the island city, dimly visible under the gray skies. With Tan Tock and the two Malay quartermasters to aid him, Stone found himself in charge of the ship.

The remaining passengers — Chinese, Malays, and some mongrel ruffians — were wildly praying or stoically smoking opium. A dozen had flung themselves overboard after the boats and were lost. Stone moved among the rest, explaining matters, and in a few moments had them working cheerfully enough breaking out more stores.

"See here!" He took the two quartermasters aside. "What is that island named?"

"*Tuan*, it is called the Isle of Jehan-num," returned one uneasily.

"Hell Island, eh? It'll be well named. When the boats come back, keep one empty for ourselves and pick out for rowers four more men whom you can trust. We will be the last to leave. Tan Tock goes with us. You will not fail me in this?"

The eyes of the two stalwart seamen flickered over his shoulder. He turned to see the steward standing almost beside him.

"Hello there—you heard the orders? Everything ready?"

"Yes, *tuan*." Tan Tock assented respectfully, his yellow face impassive as a Buddha's.

"We obey you, *tuan*," said the quartermasters as one man.

Stone turned back to the Sultan's cabin and waited at the door until Miss Bretton appeared with a hand-bag.

"We may as well wait here," he said

quietly. "Excuse me while I get a few of the Sultan's cigars. Might as well loot what I can."

He entered the cabin and filled his pockets from the locker, then rejoined her. She was pale, as ever, with the same hint of childlike wonder in her eyes. But Stone was not deceived by that look; it sprang, he knew well, from a virginity of soul which was rare in this corner of earth — a heart of steel, so finely tempered from within that no exterior force could threaten its resiliency. Stone wondered what had sent this child-woman into these lands, upon such an errand as hers. Surely a mischance of Fate!

"I'll take another look up the ladder. Sit down, Miss Bretton."

He ran lightly up the companionway and paused, head and shoulders above the coaming, for a glance around. The Penang was being driven more solidly into the bar by every following wave, and gave no immediate signs of breaking up. Mickelson's boats were lost to sight. The crowd on deck had relapsed into quietude.

As Stone took a step down to return, something flicked over his shoulder, and a knife slapped and quivered in the coaming; had he stayed where he was it would have gone through his heart.

He whirled and jerked out a revolver. But no one was in sight. The port-ladder had been lowered and the crowd was huddled there in the waist, waiting for the boats. The knife itself was an ugly little throwing - weapon. Stone shrugged his shoulders.

"Some Malay devil who wanted to kill an infidel," he thought. "And cursed near did it!"

Returning, he found Miss Bretton sitting in one of the Sultan's red-plush chairs — asleep! Stone eyed her with wonder; then he recalled that she must have been intensely wearied by lack of sleep and the strain of events, and now, with the ship motionless, she had given way. He saw that her hair was, like her face, unbeautiful, yet across its dull yel-

low ran a sheen of gold, like the smile that lighted her face into glory. He turned from gazing at her, with a vague sense of shame. She was like the Golden Virgin of Besut.

Fortunately, the Penang's supply of boats and pontoon-rafts was excellent, for the Sultan never took chances when traveling. Mickelson had towed away two rafts laden with pilgrims, and owing to this fact those who remained would be easily accommodated on the second trip, and Stone could have one boat for himself. The presence of Agnes Bretton had caused him to form a simple and definite plan for the use of that boat.

Stone had no intention of joining the main mass of castaways. The disaster was due wholly to Benbow and Mickelson, who could take their medicine. Stone intended to keep away from the crowd until the storm had blown itself out, then to set forth for Kuala Gajah in his own boat, with Miss Bretton, and he had made preparations accordingly. Unfortunately for all concerned, however, the American kept his intentions to himself.

Half an hour later, yells of joy from the deck apprised him that the boats were returning. He wakened Miss Bretton, and together they sought the deck. Stone kept his hand on a revolver, but was given no further sign of trouble. Joining Tan Tock, Stone contrived a sling with which to send down the cases of mineral water, and the boats came under the lee of the slowly-settling bows.

The two quartermasters did their work well. While Mickelson came aboard to superintend the loading of the remaining passengers, they brought one boat and four rowers around to the lowered gangway ladder; before the second officer realized what was forward, Stone had loaded his supplies aboard and was helping Miss Bretton down. He got her safely into the pitching boat, and returned to the deck to find Mickelson interrogating Tan Tock.

"What's all this?" The Scot turned angrily as Stone joined them. "You're—"

"I'm attending to business, Mickelson," cut in Stone evenly, his eyes narrowing. "You'd better finish the embarkation and look sharp about it. This junkpile will go to pieces under us in a few more minutes."

"What were you loading up with mast and sail for?" demanded Mickelson thickly, his jaw shoving forward in accusation. "Figurin' to run off with the woman, hey?"

Tan Tock stood to one side, hands in sleeves. That he had innocently told Mickelson of Stone's preparations was undoubted.

"I'm going to the island with all of you," said Stone quietly. "If you say one word more to me, Mickelson, I'll drill you. Mind—one word! Get to work, you filthy dog!"

A revolver flashed out in his hand. Mickelson's mouth opened, but before the look in Stone's eyes it closed with a snap. The second officer turned and strode away.

"Get down to the boat, Tan Tock. Mind how you jump!"

Stone followed the steward down the ladder, timed his jump as the boat lifted, and fell asprawl in the stern beside Miss Bretton. She pulled him up, and he gripped the tiller as the Malays gave way.

Mickelson's work was done. The boats crowded under the port bow were filing off across the bar, loaded deep; the last man gone, Mickelson himself jumped, was hauled into one of the boats, and headed north.

"Now, boys," Stone smiled as he faced his men and lifted his voice down the wind to them, "I want you to work. We must get to the island before any of those other boats."

"Aye, tuan!" came the grunted chorus, and the long oars bent again.

The stroke was one of the Malay seamen who had made the first trip. From him Stone learned that the island city was very large, and that the Malays in general believed it to be the abode of evil spirits. Also he learned that between

the Malays and Chinese was bad blood, and that so far as any one knew, there was no water on Hell Island.

Mickelson's boats were passed without effort, but still Stone urged his rowers ahead. In the lee of the mangrove swamps the surface of the lagoon was well protected, and gradually the gray mass of Hell Island drew into shape before them. A fantastic thing it was, and a fantastic city it must have been, connected by a causeway with the mainland in the ages before the coastline began to sink.

Like other such ancient cities of the jungle, it was too massively built to be ruined by anything less than an earthquake. The island, half a mile in length, was solidly covered with masonry—palaces and temples whose carven glories and obscenities were now masked by jungle vines and towering trees. Straight ahead was the great wharf of which Stone had heard tales, a mammoth platform of hewn stone; here the other boats had landed, as the crowd of natives testified. Stone caught sight of Captain Benbow watching.

"Sobered up, eh?" he reflected. "We'll not bother him for a while."

He turned the boat's head to the right, paid no heed to Benbow's waving arms, and the great wharf slid behind them.

"Look at the birds!" exclaimed Miss Bretton suddenly.

"Yes, the storm has driven them to shelter," assented Stone. The trees and vines seemed cloaked with birds, seabirds, and gay creatures of the jungle, and the carven edges of old temples were etched by them into color. "Ah, there's the place we want!"

A little promontory opened up ahead, upon which stood a fairy-land building—the pavilion of some forgotten Sultan's favorite, perhaps. A perfect example of the Indo-Burmese art it was, a tiny, two-storied, pagoda-like structure, masked by ornate carving into semblance of a much larger building, and connected with the maze of other ruins by a wide stone plat-

form that was bare except for a spreading baobab tree in the center. The little building itself seemed untouched by the jungle growths, and was exactly suited to Stone's requirements.

"It's a dear little place!" said Miss Bretton.

Stone laughed. "It won't be very long. If it 'll hold us until to-night I'm satisfied."

"Until to-night?" Her eyes came to him questioningly. "Why?"

"Well, I'm greatly tempted to run away with you to-night!" Stone looked into her eyes and laughed again. "In fact, I think I shall. Will you mind? To be frank, this is not going to be a good place in which to stay, Miss Bretton."

"And we'll really run away together?" She colored slightly, merriment in her gaze.

"You bet we will!" rejoined Stone cheerfully. He turned to find Tan Tock, the steward, who was crouched beside the stroke oarsman, gazing at him fixedly. "All right, Tan Tock—hop ashore! We'll stop here, boys."

Tan Tock wrinkled his yellow face, as if in distaste of the orders, then jumped to the rocks against which Stone laid the boat. Five minutes later they were all ashore, and Stone set about inspecting his new quarters.

They found the pavilion free of snakes, being, in fact, a mere stone shell of the former grandeur. The lower and larger chamber opened directly upon the great platform and baobab tree; ascending by the stone stairs, they found the upper chamber to be intact and habitable.

"We'll pull out after dark for Kuala Gajah," he said to the girl at his side. "You had best stay up here until then. Benbow and Mickelson will be over here soon, and I want to know that you're out of danger."

"There'll be—danger? How?"

"Danger from unscrupulous men, my dear young lady. Please accept my dictum."

She assented meekly enough. Stone returned to the boat, got a portion of its load, ashore and up to the pavilion, and set Tan Tock to work getting them all a meal. He said nothing of his ulterior plans, however; nor did it occur to him that his half-jesting words to Miss Bretton in the boat might have fallen upon ears which would construe them as other than jest.

Stone's forebodings proved to be quite justified by events.

Tan Tock's meal was served and polished off. Half an hour afterward Stone, who was congratulating himself that the gale would be blown out before night, observed a boat coming along the island shore toward the pavilion. In the boat were seamen, with Captain Benbow and Mickelson. Stone joined his men, who were also watching the boat.

"Now, boys," he said quietly, hands in his jacket-pockets, "here come Tuan Benbow and Tuan Mickelson. Do you choose to obey me or obey them? If you obey me there may be some fighting before we go away."

The eyes of the Malays gleamed at the mention of fighting; your Malay is a man of peace, but his fathers were pirates and reivers. It was Tan Tock, however, who made reply.

"We obey you, *tuan!*"

"Aye! We obey you!" chorused the others quickly.

"Good," said Stone. "Then listen well to the talk, for in it you may learn that in following me you have done well for yourselves."

He strode down to the rocks above his boat, and stood there waiting. Although Miss Bretton remained in the upper chamber of the pavilion, he knew that she would hear all that passed. So, too, would the men behind him.

The other boat drew in slowly. A huge beef-eater was Captain Benbow, with a great, red face like the face of Borrow's apple-woman, a liar's soul behind his staring blue eyes, and the dan-

gerous courage of a carrion rat in his heart. Beside him in the stern was the bulky, menacing figure of Mickelson. To all appearance neither man was armed, but Stone was not deceived by appearances.

"Way enough!" cried Stone when the skipper's boat was twenty feet out. "Back water, you men! What do you want, cap'n?"

The boat stopped. Benbow cursed, then tried wheedling.

"I say now, old chap! Don't be so bloomin' set up—"

"Stay where you are."

"But let us come in and stretch our legs a bit, you know—"

"Stay where you are. What do you want?"

Benbow's red face flushed purple; with an effort, he repressed his emotion.

"Come, now, Stone! Dashed bloomin' mess, old chap—all pull together, you know—in union strength—white men, eh, what?"

"What do you want?"

"Seamen in distress, old chap. No water on this bally island, except the few casks in our boats—cursed stinkin' stuff, and even the Chinks turn up their noses at it. So we've come over to join forces—"

"I don't want you."

"Eh?" Benbow's voice rose to a hoarse bellow. "No spoofin', old boy! We want—"

"Your wants don't matter, cap'n," rejoined Stone imperturbably. "While you lay drunk in your berth, Mickelson's rotten stowing smashed the old Penang, and we'd all have gone down except for me. I have the ship's papers and the log, and it'll be entered up just as it happened, so try that in your cuddy pipe, old chap!"

"Now you're stranded with your passengers, so make the best of it. If you've no good water it's because you were too cursed drunk to get it—so make the best of it. If you don't like your company over yonder, skip out and leave 'em. But keep away from *here!*!"

Mickelson remained dour, silent, a threatening light in his pig-eyes; but Benbow rose and shook his fist in wild rage.

"So that's it, eh, my bully?" he roared. "Thinkin' you'll sneak off wi' the woman, eh? Tell you what I'll do, lad—turn over the woman, and go your ways; refuse, and I'll set the whole bloomin' lot o' brown devils on your neck!"

Stone smiled.

"If you want the woman, why not come and take her?"

Benbow's hand went to his pocket; but he hesitated and weakened before the unmoving, inscrutable American. A torrid curse broke from him.

"Jump on him, you boys!" he cried out to the brown men behind Stone. "You, quartermaster, take him from behind—"

Stone caught a movement behind him, but dared not take his eyes from Benbow, nor his hand from the revolver in his pocket. Then, unexpectedly, the thin voice of Tan Tock, surcharged with anger, rose from beside him.

"You, Tuan Benbow, we are not your men! It is the white woman you want, then? Wait until the Sultan hears of this, dog of an infidel! May Allah take you alive to Jehannum!"

Now, as though at mention of the Sultan, Mickelson made a wry face and spoke out.

"Stone, don't be a fool! Throw in wi' white men, lad; have naught to do wi' them heathen or ye'll have a knife in the back one o' these days. Tan Tock there is the worst murderin' devil unhung—"

"Clear out," ordered Stone briefly. He saw that Tan Tock hated Benbow, and for some occult reason had chosen to protect Miss Bretton from the skipper; and he was now well satisfied that his men would stand behind him. That Benbow would set the Malays and Chinese upon him he did not doubt. In any case, they would be at his throat for the precious bottled water—if he remained

here. But Stone did not intend to remain for long.

"Why don't you two precious ones pull for Kuala Gajah to-night when the wind goes down?" continued Stone, seeing that they hesitated before him. Mickelson responded with a black scowl, sweeping his hand toward the two rowers.

"There's not enough boats for all, an' the brown devils smashed 'em and smashed all the oars but them two—if they can't get away, d'ye see, they mean to keep us, too! Fat chance we'd have wi' two oars! No, give us a lift in your craft, Stone—don't go back on your own color—"

"Get to hell out of here," cut in Stone calmly. "You're probably lying, but I don't care if you are or not—get out!"

"You'll sweat for this!" stormed Benbow. "It's mutiny, that's what!"

Still storming, he ordered his men to give way. Still smiling, Stone watched them go, then turned to Tan Tock and the seamen.

"Good! Tan Tock, remain here and watch along the shore for boats; the rest of you go over among those ruins, work your way along carefully, and bring in word when any comes. They may not wait until night before attacking."

"Yes, *tuan*," was the response.

Stone strode on to the pavilion. At the entrance he turned to look seaward; Benbow's boat was crawling away along the shore line, while Tan Tock was talking with the quartermasters. Then the latter turned with their men and departed across the open pavement to the jungled ruins beyond, and Tan Tock seated himself on a rock above the tethered boat.

Stone passed on into the pavilion. As he recalled the words of Mickelson, the tale of the smashed boats and oars began to appear less incredible; at first he had deemed it a lie, but now he believed it true. The Malays and Chinese, seeing themselves marooned and in sore straits, would without doubt have insured against the two white men leaving them, and they had apparently done so very promptly

and efficiently. Such was their character. Mickelson and Benbow were alone with seven-score sharp kries of Trenganu steel, which would become sanctified by the blood of an infidel, and Stone was not in the least worried over their predicament.

He found Miss Bretton waiting for him, sitting under the ruined roof with a slight smile traced upon her pale features, her gray eyes gleaming at him like the fire-lit jade eyes of the god in the Yellow Temple.

"You heard?"

"Yes, Mr. Stone." That was all; a simple assent. No talk of her danger, no hysterical fear of lust and rapine, no overwhelming of soul before the unleashed and monstrous terror of the jungle world. Stone's eyes lightened with admiration. This girl plainly understood her position—and was not afraid!

"If they leave us alone we'll clear out of here a couple of hours after dark," he said quietly. "Tan Tock will stand by me—"

"Don't trust him too far."

"Eh? Why not? He saved you from Benbow when you came aboard."

"I understand that. Still, I have an instinctive fear of him."

Outwardly, Stone nodded assent. Inwardly, however, he laughed to himself; she was afraid of all these yellow-brown men, he thought, and it was only natural that her armor should give way at some point. To doubt Tan Tock was absurd, of course.

"If you don't mind, I'll stretch out here at the head of the stairs for an hour's nap." The American smiled wryly. "There are no snakes up here, and I'm afraid of 'em down below. You don't mind, I hope? I don't want to call in any of the men to watch over me—"

"Please don't be foolish!" A rippling smile stole across her pale face. "You know that it will be my privilege to be of any help. Aren't we partners in distress?"

"Sure! Want a gun, partner?"

She shook her head. Stone, with a great sigh of relief, stretched out on the flags.

CHAPTER III.

TAN TOCK'S STORY.

STONE wakened at the touch of a hand on his brow, to find the swift twilight of the Eastern lands already dusking everything.

"Come," said the quiet voice of Miss Bretton. "Supper is ready. Also, Tan Tock wants to speak with you. He is down below."

Yawning, thanking Heaven for the snatch of sleep which had so greatly refreshed him, the American descended the stairs. Instantly he sensed something antagonistic in the scene below, and halted, whipping out his revolver.

A candle burned in one corner, dimly lighting the meal which had been laid out on the two lower stairs. Tan Tock and the six Malays stood awaiting his descent, and vaguely Stone felt an unseen danger, although they smiled up at him.

"Any sign of trouble outside?" he demanded.

"None, *tuan*," returned the steward. "May I have speech with you in private?"

Stone glanced around. To his surprise he saw cases of mineral water and stores piled near the door.

"Why was the boat unloaded?" he questioned sharply. "I gave no orders—"

"*Tuan*, it leaked," spoke up one of the quartermasters. "We brought the things in here while we calked up a loose seam. If this was wrong, the fault is mine."

"No, no. You did well." Stone rather felt ashamed of his own half-sensed fears.

"Run along outside, boys, and give Tan Tock a chance to speak with me in private, since that is his desire. Then come back and we'll dine."

For a moment no one moved. Tan Tock gazed up at the American with his

yellow face wrinkled deeply until it looked like the face of the ancient monkey at the gate of the Hu Hsuan pagoda; then the steward's lips moved in soft Malay, and the six seamen turned and filed away. With something of a shock Stone realized that they were not obeying him after all. They were obeying Tan Tock—and all along they had been obeying Tan Tock!

"What do you want to say?" Stone demanded swiftly, suspicion in his eyes.

"Tuan, I wish to tell you a tale of my grandfather. Will you come down and listen?"

"Eh? Your grandfather? What has it to do with me?"

"Tuan, my grandfather was a fisherman and lived here near the Gudang River. He had been often at this Island of Jehannum and knew it well. His tale is of this building wherein we stand, and if Allah wills, that tale may yet save our lives."

So Tan Tock knew something about this place—something worth keeping secret! The American dismissed his suspicions altogether; but, remembering that the open doorway might well afford entry to a bullet from Benbow's boat, he leaped lightly to the flagged floor below, and, filling his pipe, sat down on a box at one side of the door.

"Come over here out of the candle-light and talk," he said. "Make the tale short."

"It is not long, *tuan*."

Tan Tock joined him, squatted down on the floor, and waited respectfully while Stone lighted his pipe. Then the yellow man began to speak, choosing his words carefully.

"Tuan, my grandfather was very brave and was not afraid of the devils who dwell upon this island, as men say. Also he was a large man, as large in his body as Lim Perak, the steelwright, who makes a kris of great worth. Once, as he told me, my grandfather came to this very pagoda in which we stand; he came because a yellow woman stood on the

rocks and beckoned him, and he desired her even though she were a devil, as seemed likely."

"A yellow woman?" questioned Stone. "What mean you by that?"

"I know not," replied Tan Tock slowly. "My grandfather said she was a yellow woman, and no more. She beckoned, and he paddled his canoe to these rocks outside, and joined her. She led him into this place and made love to him after the fashion of all devils."

"Yes? What is that fashion?" said Stone amusedly.

"Allah knows it is not to be spoken of!" returned the steward, dropping his voice. "Yet it was this very place, for my grandfather described it exactly as it now is. He said that after a time she led him through an opening in the floor, from which they gained a passage-way; and this passage took them into a great underground room, greater even than the audience hall of the Sultan at Kuala Gajah, and the room was filled with all manner of precious things—aye, even unto tables of jade and cups of ruby and emerald! Other devils came and brought wondrous dishes, and my grandfather ate and drank without fear, because his heart was filled with love for the yellow woman."

Tan Tock paused and cocked his head to one side, as though listening. Stone also listened, but could hear nothing save the waves rippling on the shore in the darkness outside. Then the steward continued his tale.

"Presently my grandfather became drunk, and he wakened to find himself in his canoe, floating on the water, and that is all the story. But, *tuan*, it seems to me that we might turn this tale to our advantage, you and I. I fear the devils, but you are an infidel and do not; therefore, if we might find this passage together, you might carry off some of the wondrous things from that room, and we would both become wealthy by the will of Allah!"

Stone puffed at his pipe, scrutinizing

the impassible yellow face of Tan Tock. The story was a common enough tale of devils, and Stone would have taken no heed had it not been for the attendant circumstances.

What if there were some truth at the bottom of it all? Stone knew that the secrets of these ancient ruined cities, dotting the jungle from the Straits to China, had never been probed to the depths. What if Tan Tock's grandfather had indeed stumbled upon some passage, some underground chamber of forgotten gods? The thought was enticing.

"But how to find the passage-way, Tan Tock?" asked Stone. "Did he tell you how it was gained?"

"Yes, tuan. There was a stone in the floor, a stone that turned when one corner was stepped heavily upon."

"And where was that stone?"

"Near the stairs, tuan. I do not know its exact position."

"Come, then."

Stone knocked out his pipe, pocketed the briar, and with the steward beside him crossed to the stairs. Forgotten was the danger, which at worst was only a possible one, in the wealth of surmise to which the steward's tale gave birth. What jewels of ancient days might lie buried here, who could say?

During perhaps five minutes the two men essayed the discovery of that passage, treading upon the corners of the hewn flags, examining each block for some sign of an opening. They found nothing until Stone discovered that the paving was set in some substance like concrete, or concrete itself; and he realized then that these blocks had never moved since this place had been built.

"I believe your tale held more invention than truth, Tan Tock!" Stone eyed the steward, who promptly squatted down and grinned. "Eh? Was it a lie?"

"Tuan, it was a lie, and a good one!"

At this astonishingly abrupt confession Stone stared amazingly. Tan Tock met his eye with ingenuous delight, as if expecting the white man to admire the jest.

"Why—confound you, what do you mean?" snapped Stone with rising anger.

"Tuan, it was necessary." Tan Tock shrugged his shoulders. He seemed to pay no heed to the figure of Miss Bretton, which appeared on the stairs above. Stone glanced up and made her a little sign of caution. She waited, listening.

"Necessary to lie in that fashion?" exclaimed the American. "Then I'll find it necessary to make you sweat for your lies, Tan Tock—"

"It is too late, tuan," broke in the other calmly, "although you will probably kill me now. Still, I have done my best, and the event is in the hand of Allah, and I have served my master faithfully."

Stone eyed him a moment in frankly puzzled surmise. The little yellow man had settled into fatalistic calm; a sudden inscrutable dignity had descended upon him, and now his features had the placid vacancy of the wooden Buddha of Rangoon.

"I shall not kill you," returned the perplexed American, "if you explain your lie."

"Well, tuan, it is quickly explained." Tan Tock took from his girdle some betel paste and filled his mouth. "This white woman came aboard us last night; my orders were to bring her safely to my master—"

"Your master? You mean—the Sultan?"

Tan Tock nodded. "Yes. Therefore I protected her from Tuan Benbow. Therefore, when this morning you took charge of her, I tried to kill you—"

"You! You flung that knife?" Stone cried out in utter surprise. "Why? Why did you—"

"The woman must come safe to my master," was the imperturbable response. "Later, as things fell out here, my plans changed. You wanted the woman yourself and intended to run away with her. Good! You would keep her safe against Tuan Benbow—good! So instead of killing you and taking the woman on to my master, I decided to let you protect

her and to send for my master. When he comes he may punish or release you as he wills, and he will find the woman safe also—”

“ What mad talk is all this?” exclaimed Stone, dimly comprehending and yet shrinking from belief in what he heard. “ You have sent for the Sultan? How, in the name of Allah?”

Tan Tock grinned fleetingly. “ *Tuan*, he will come to-morrow, if the waters are quiet. I have sent for him. Here is the water and food from the boat, and here we stay, you and I—unless you kill me, in which case I shall stay of a certainty. Yet you cannot get away with the woman—”

“ How did you send for the Sultan?” demanded Stone, feeling bewildered and helpless before this guileful, inscrutable Oriental. “ Why did you tell that lie about—”

“ I told the lie to keep your thoughts busy, *tuan*, while my messengers departed.”

With that a sudden curse broke from Stone, and he rushed to the door. He understood at last; he knew now that he had been snared in a veritable net of words woven by this cunning yellow fox.

And, as he thought this, he found the six Malay seamen gone, for they had taken their orders from Tan Tock, the emissary of the Sultan. Gone, too, was the boat that had been tethered to the rocks. By now it was lost in the darkness, on the way to Kuala Gajah!

For a moment Stone felt madness bite at his brain—felt the impulse to rush back and throttle Tan Tock, the steward. Then he laughed harshly. A faithful steward indeed! The realization of the yellow man’s greatness came gradually to him.

Tan Tock, expecting to be killed by Stone, had not deserted his charge, but was serving his master truly—a man true to his salt, even unto death.

Stone swung about, and, in the doorway, stood face to face with Miss Bretton.

“ It would appear that I am of some consequence to the Sultan,” said she, with

a smile that made Stone’s heart sink. He could dimly see her features, and knew that she was, in a manner of speaking, under a misapprehension.

“ Yes,” he said grimly, and gently urged her inside. He turned to the squatting Tan Tock. “ Your master, the Sultan, wrote for this white woman to come. Why?”

“ For what except to enter into his harem, *tuan*? ”

A cry broke from Miss Bretton. “ Not true—it’s not true! I—”

“ Quiet, please!” Stone hushed her imperatively; it was unpleasant work, but it had to be done. “ Tan Tock, answer this question truly, and I will give you a revolver with which to fight; you are too brave a man to be slain for serving your master faithfully. Is a Christian mission to be established at Kuala Gajah? Is there to be a mosque of Christians built there?”

Tan Tock laughed, and his laugh was like the snick of a kris.

“ *Tuan*, think you Sultan Lumpur is mad in the sight of Allah?” he said mockingly. “ When an *ulema* of the Nazarenes sets up shop in Kuala Gajah, then will the Sultan be stricken with blindness and the infirmities of age.”

“ But so he wrote to the Christians at Singapore, Tan Tock.”

“ Very likely, *tuan*. And he has written also to the Raja of Besut that ere another month passed his harem would boast a white concubine who was neither a naught girl nor an outcast woman of the white men. That is all, *tuan*. ”

It was enough, indeed. A little moan broke from Agnes Bretton; even in the dim candle-glow Stone could make out the horror of realization that filled her gray eyes and turned her face to a ghastly white. In the only possible way she had been apprised of the truth ere it was too late. Even now, as Stone reflected, it might be too late. Tan Tock seemed very sure of himself, and with reason.

“ If the yellow monkey expects me to fight off Benbow and Mickelson, only to

hand over Miss Bretton to the Sultan to-morrow—well, what else is there to do?" thought Stone. "Looks very much as though I were putty in his hands. H-m! I'm afraid Mr. Tan Tock is due to revise his theories of the white race, and Mr. Sultan Lumpur is going to meet with something of a shock to-morrow—if to-morrow comes!"

"Come," he said quietly to the girl, taking her hand and turning her to the stairs. "Come, let us be brave, for we must pull out of this to-morrow; and I think I shall have need of your courage. Trust me, and perhaps we shall find a new way out."

She forced herself to the task resolutely enough.

Realizing that Tan Tock was to be fully trusted so far as the defense of Agnes Bretton was concerned, which meant the defense of the pavilion, Stone did not hesitate to give the steward a revolver and to set him on guard duty outside. Then, over their sad meal, Stone compelled his companion to a frank discussion of her situation.

It was not, as they say in England, "nice"; yet, to his amazement, Stone discovered in her a twofold quality of character—a spirit virginal, untouched, shrinking; yet coupled with this a knowledge of the world from which her spirit, as it were, held aloof and afar.

It was his first experience with the bared soul of a woman, his first delving into the mysteries of things womanly. It frightened him.

Gradually she realized clearly that in this environment of savagery her character of missionary was not held sacred; no more was she sacrosanct than any nautch girl out of the Purple Pagoda under Paradise Hill. She was a woman, and therefore fair prey; a white woman, and therefore greatly to be desired—yea, even above pearls!

"But—but Captain Benbow!" she said, and paused. "I do not understand, Mr. Stone. Perhaps I was foolish to think that all white men—"

"You were," he assented bluntly. "Out here the chief code of ethics is strength to take and hold, because this end of creation is filled with wastrels from the other worlds. Good men—oh, plenty of them! But the good men don't command rotten ships like the old Penang. Benbow is in the depths. So is Mickelson—a surly brute who'd shoot Benbow in a minute to possess you."

Her gray eyes bored into him for a space.

"And Mr. Richard Stone?" she said gravely. "He, too, was an officer on the Penang."

"Sure." Stone looked away from her eyes swiftly. "He's a pretty bad lot, too, Miss Bretton; no doubt about it." Then his lips curved in a grim smile, and his eyes gripped again on hers. "You know that there are good and bad rulers, don't you?"

"How do you mean?"

"What I say, literally. Rulers, good and bad! Sultan Lumpur of Kuala Gajah is one of the bad kind. He runs the hell-hole of this coast—English educated, Paris bred, Malay by instinct, he is, and Kuala Gajah is like unto him in viciousness. On the other hand, take the Raja of Hell Island, and he isn't a bad sort in his way; one of the good kind of rulers, in fact! If you'll trust to him, he'll see you through, by hook or crook."

The gray eyes widened. "Who is this raja? I never heard of him! Nor of—of Hell Island, either—"

Stone laughed the joyous laugh of a boy.

"The raja—behold him! Hell Island—behold it!" He swept out his hand. "That is the native name for this island. From this moment I am its ruler, I, Richard the First and Only! Sultan Lumpur is served by crafty dogs like Tan Tock, ministers of wickedness, *ames damnés*; but the Raja of Hell Island is served by—himself.

"Now, Miss Bretton," and the mirthful jesting passed from his eyes, to be replaced by a sudden deep and earnest

grimness, "right does not make might, but might in this case makes right. I shall play raja clear up to the hilt, and save you if possible. There'll be a hot brush with Benbow and Mickelson, and men will die of the heat, but the real work comes about to-morrow noon, when the Sultan will probably arrive in his private barge. What I shall do then, I don't know; but I shall do my best not to fail. Failure means death for me, and for you—and I'm not ready to die. Are you?"

"No," she said, hesitant, compelled by the fire of his words.

"Good!" Stone sprang up and held out his hand. "The up-stairs room is yours—don't leave it until I call you, no matter what happens. Good night, little lady!"

"Good night—raja!" And with a brave smile curving her lips she passed up the broad stone stairs and out of his sight. If, in the upper darkness, the smile turned to quiet tears—how was he to know it?

Something new had entered into Richard Stone—something of his own brave boast, indeed. Raja of Hell Island! The words burned into him, swept through his blood like wine. As he strode out and came upon Tan Tock, sitting upon a rock above the liquid waves and watching a faint glow along the shoreline, there was a new virility in his bearing, a sudden acquisition of power and self-surety which brought the yellow man to his feet, astounded, at Stone's first words.

"Tan Tock! Give me your attention. Is there danger from sharks in this lagoon?"

"No, *tuan*." The cloudy sky overcast all things, but even in the obscurity Stone could not the staring eyes of the Sultan's steward. "There are small sharks, perhaps, but large ones do not cross the bar, and the small ones are easily frightened in these waters." A wave of the hand pointed to the faintly phosphorescent waves limned against the night.

"Good! Can you swim?"

"Yes, *tuan*."

"Come, then. We go to a kilfing, you and I, for the sake of her in yonder. Go eat, then come swiftly."

"Swimming is best with an empty belly, *tuan*!"

"Then follow me." Stone swiftly began to strip. "Tie your revolver over your head, and do as I bid. What is that glow against the shore?"

"It is where a fire burns, *tuan*."

"Come."

Tan Tock followed him into the water, like a man dazed.

CHAPTER IV.

THE SULTAN COMES.

WHILE these things were passing at the pagoda-pavilion, Benbow and Mickelson were not without some trouble on their hands. The ancient wharf of this forgotten city was a gigantic thing—a platform of hewn stone blocks, which stretched unbroken under the jungle growths.

Ten feet above the water's edge it stood; from the water ran up a short flight of wide stairs, at the bottom of which was tethered the single boat remaining to Benbow. Up above were the castaways.

A circle of the great wharf around the stairs had been cleared of vines and creepers, and was now lighted by a dozen fires. The Malays, by far the most numerous, had taken possession of the water-casks and bags of biscuit, and doled out a stingy portion to the sullen Chinese. This had not been peacefully adjusted, for every man had knife or kris, and not a few of the pilgrims from Mecca bore pistols; it was not to be wondered at that a dozen bodies littered the edge of the shadows.

Supper, however meager, had contrived to quiet the unruly spirits, and now Benbow and Mickelson were threading among the groups of smoking men, upon an errand all their own.

"The rewards," Benbow was careful to explain in fluent dialect, "will be many and great! This fool of an infidel wrecked the ship, and the Sultan will reward whoever punishes him. In his boat he has great store of sweet water, liquor and food, which will be a very immediate and needful reward to whoever slays him. Also, there is the white woman who belonged to the Sultan, and whom he stole from my care; whoever returns her to me shall have great reward from the Sultan!"

"Aye, *tuan*," argued one of the holy pilgrims, clutching his pistol, "but how to get away from here? How shall we come to the Sultan?"

"By sending either me or Tuan Mickelson in the boat, with a few of you and a few of the seamen," rejoined Benbow promptly. "The Sultan will then send to rescue all of us."

"By Allah, that is a good plan!" the murmur passed around, and they fell into talk, until the great landing buzzed like the bee-caves of Angkor.

Something of this talk came to the ears of Stone and Tan Tock, who silently swam to the stairway that cleft down through the hewn stones, and drew themselves out of the water on the lowermost step, beyond the sight of those on the wharves above. For a space they lay motionless, resting and listening to what passed overhead.

Stone saw that Benbow had told the truth about the boats, for there was but the one remaining. He lay on the slimy stone step, and Tan Tock lay beside him. Suddenly the yellow man spoke very softly.

"*Tuan*, what thought is in your mind?"

The American started. But the other continued speaking.

"It is in your mind to take this boat and go away with the white woman? This you cannot do, *tuan*."

"No?" Stone glanced at the little man. "You think I cannot kill you?"

"Oh, I am mortal, *tuan*!" Tan Tock chuckled. "But, remember, I, too, have a revolver, and a single shout or shot

would bring these men about your heels. You might kill me, but a hundred of them would swim after you, and you could not escape with the boat."

The American gazed at the figure of the little steward for a long moment. He knew that Tan Tock was right, and he abandoned the plan that had flashed into his mind. He was quite willing to kill the steward, but he was unwilling to stake everything on a long chance. And Tan Tock, he realized, did not know how to bluff.

"Very well," he nodded acquiescence. "Then get into the boat, draw her plugs, and we will swim out with her and let her sink. Thus these men cannot reach us until dawn, for to thread the jungles after nightfall is impossible."

"Very well, *tuan*."

Tan Tock slipped off the step like an eel, and his kris sliced through the painter of the boat. He floated with it out into the darkness and vanished from sight.

Now, whether some ear above had caught their low voices, or whether things fell out by sheer chance, Stone never learned. For a moment he remained on the step, gathering his strength for the swim back to the pavilion; without warning a figure stepped naked-footed on the stairs above, and was followed by a second. The second was that of Mickelson, who bore a flaming brand from a fire.

"Stone!"

With the word, Mickelson plucked forth a revolver and fired—a fraction of an instant too late. Seeing the motion, Stone placed a bullet squarely between the second officer's eyes, and slid off into the water. The native beside Mickelson, like a flying jungle-bat, leaped high in air and dove out for the American, kris in hand.

The night became an inferno. Stone had anticipated no such scene as this when he had started over. The man who had leaped in almost on top of him came at him with a shrill cry of rage. Not

daring to fire the water-choked revolver, Stone slashed across the Malay's face with the fore-sight, and the man sank. As Tan Tock had predicted, however, the American found himself hard put to it to escape from the horde who came plunging after.

The edge of the great stone wharf was lined with dancing, yelling shapes, torches in hand. In the weird light it seemed that scores of figures were "taking off" for the dive, kries clenched between white teeth, naked bodies flashing darkly. Of Tan Tock, Stone could see nothing, nor was the boat visible to his brief glance; seemingly the steward had gotten it beyond the radius of light.

"Here goes!" thought Stone grimly, taking in a long breath. "It's my only chance—"

Barely ten seconds had transpired since Mickelson's cry and shot, but already the water was foaming and splashing high with swimmers. Dropping his useless weapon, Stone plunged forward in a long, deep dive, hoping only to escape those murderous kries.

Under the water he swam until his lungs seemed bursting asunder, until his brain was afire with more-coruscating lights than the Genji firefly-festival ever bore. Then, in desperation, he headed upward, and an instant later sobbed the cool night air into his fiery lungs.

"Wah! Allah!"

The yell streamed up beside him, and he turned barely in time to meet a steel-tipped swimmer. Just at the verge of the torch-light, ten feet farther would have carried Stone safely past the danger; but he wasted no time on "ifs." His fist smashed home on a brown face, and before the nearer Malays could come up Stone dived and was off again.

This time he expended his last ounce of staying power before coming up—and when he broke into the air again he was beyond sight of the wharves. Careless if he were seen by the swimmers, so that he could reach the pavilion and his weapons, he struck out in a swift and steady "crawl" down the shore-line. Yells from

behind told him that his phosphorescent wake was observed, but he held onward without pause, confident in his speed.

When he seemed to have flung off pursuit he proceeded at a more sensible stroke. The hoarse bellow of Captain Benbow broke through the storm of voices behind, and Stone conjectured that, for lack of a boat, a swimming party was being sent to attack the pavilion. He laughed grimly at thought of the revolvers in his coat-pockets.

The minutes fled fast. He was beginning to scan the line of shore in the effort to make out some trace of the pagoda against the stars, when suddenly he came to an abrupt halt, and trod water, staring ahead in quick surprise.

A tiny tongue of flame was licking upward in the darkness—well out from shore and about fifty yards ahead of the American. It grew rapidly; a moment later Stone realized that it came not from the water, but from the little promontory upon which stood the pavilion. The flicker increased—the flame became a fire, cunningly builded against rocks, so that behind it was nothing visible, yet the water before and around it was plainly lighted.

"Damned clever beggar!" muttered Stone, as he struck out for the beacon.

It was the work of Tan Tock, of course. Somehow the yellow steward had won back to the pavilion—either in the boat, or else by abandoning the boat. He must have abandoned it promptly, to be sure, else he could not have swum back ahead of Stone and gotten this fire alight. It was excellently placed, thought the American. No swimming party could advance through its gleams while Tan Tock had a revolver and cartridges.

"With two of us to hold the fort," reflected Stone, "Benbow will be neatly euchered. The scurvy dog! I wish I'd gotten him along with Mickelson."

He made steady headway, anxious to get into his clothes again and meet the danger which threatened from the swimming Malays. Suddenly, when he was

within thirty feet of the fire, the soft voice of Tan Tock lifted from the darkness.

"You stop, *tuan!* Go way!"

"All right, Tan Tock—it's Tuan Stone!" rejoined the American cheerfully.

"You stop or I fire!"

"What!" Stone straightened up in amazement, treading water and trying to make out something in the blackness. "Are you crazy?"

Tan Tock's soft laugh answered him. Stone threw himself forward, but a revolver spat red in the night, and the bullet clipped the water an inch from his right ear.

"Do you want to die, *tuan?* Then come on!"

The American halted, cursing in swift realization. Too late he saw his folly in trusting the yellow steward; with true Oriental guile Tan Tock had twisted the situation to serve his own ends.

"By the lord, I'll wring your neck for this!" threatened Stone with cold rage. Tan Tock sent another taunting chuckle at him, which cooled the mad fury tugging at the American's heart.

The steward had the whip hand—had scented the possibilities of the situation, and had neatly gotten rid of Stone, eliminated him. Tan Tock, therefore, remained in charge of Miss Bretton and seemed quite confident of his ability to defend his position.

"Go 'way quick!" came the soft order. "Or shall I kill you?"

Stone began to swim again. He saw that Tan Tock's fire was built at the tip of the little promontory, baffling any circling movement. So, there being naught else to do, the American swam past the promontory and wearily dragged himself into shore fifty yards farther on. He emerged from a tangle of mangrove roots, struggled up to masonry above, and, careless of snakes, flung himself down to rest.

"Can he fight off the Malays?" he reflected. "If he can, I'll get to him in the morning—I can reach him then by land, and I'll wring his cursed neck!"

He lay quiescent, watching, unable to see the promontory, but listening intently. After a space he heard yells, and then shots, coming quick and fast. These gave place to silence, then the laugh of Tan Tock quivered through the night. The Malays were repulsed.

Stone stretched out, nearly naked and quite weaponless. With the morning he would get the yellow steward, for the Sultan could not get here before noon, he reflected. So he fell asleep, biding his time and determined that with the morning he would make Tan Tock drain the cup of bitterness. He was defeated, but not conquered.

One thing, however, Stone forgot. This was the luck which had been fighting against him.

Stiff and sore in every limb, he was wakened to find early sunlight sifting down through the trees above him. A sound of high-pitched voices brought him into startled alertness; he sprang up, held aside the trailing vines and branches, and peered forth at the water.

The silence of blank, astounded dismay settled upon his soul.

Anchored fifty feet off the promontory was a bedecked, bedizened Malay *proa*, lateen sail furled high—the Sultan's state barge. And, leaving the promontory, was a boat in the stern of which sat Agnes Bretton, with Tan Tock beside her!

The Sultan had come with the dawn! The white woman was his!

The blow was overwhelming. As the boat drew under the opposite side of the *proa*, Stone dropped the vines and sat down, feeling as though a hard fist had hit him under the ear. For a moment he was knocked out.

"Damn!" he said slowly. "Those quartermasters found the Sultan somewhere down the coast—they didn't have to make Kuala Gajah itself. They probably found him during the night—and now he's here. And Agnes Bretton's aboard that cursed barge of his!"

He realized to the full his own position —unarmed, naked except for his cotton

trousers, and ashore. What must Agnes Bretton think now of his boasts and vaunted efficiency? He groaned at the thought.

Recollection, however, spurred into him. Under the sting of defeat arose the man, insuperable, his vitality but quickened by the bitterness of his position. After all, was he not the Raja of Hell Island—had he not named himself thus to Miss Bretton? And was that to be an empty and fruitless boast?

"No!" Stone leaped up again, the numbing power of the blow broken upon his resilient spirit. "No! I'll play the game to the end, by the Lord—I'll be the raja, right enough! Let them only give me a chance!"

He parted the vines, cautiously, and settled himself to watch events. Had he but wakened a half-hour earlier!

Plainly, the *proa* had just arrived; as plainly, Tan Tock had signaled to her from the promontory. Another boat was setting off toward the great wharves farther along the shore of the island, where Benbow and the castaways awaited rescue.

Upon the deck of the barge an awning was being run up. Beneath this, Stone could make out the figure of Sultan Lumpur—small, frock-coated, fezzed. Miss Bretton came to the deck, and the Sultan bowed many times. Stone saw that the girl's head was bare, her golden hair flashing in the morning sun; she seemed to be glancing around, as if seeking some one—then she allowed the Sultan to lead her below.

After a moment the Sultan reappeared, seated himself, lighted a cigar, and with every appearance of purring contentment engaged Tan Tock in a very long conversation.

"What next?" thought Stone, frowning. "If I could get aboard that craft there'd be something doing! How long will she stay at anchor? If the crafty devil pulls out now it's all off! I suppose he'd pick me up if I signaled—and throw me in irons on general principles. Thank

you, I'll go aboard as the Raja of Hell Island, not as a stranded seaman!"

His chief worry was quite speedily settled.

The boat returned from the ancient wharves, bearing Captain Benbow and two of the Mecca pilgrims, green turbans and all. They were taken to the barge, and there shortly ensued a stormy scene between Benbow and Sultan Lumpur. Between Tan Tock and the pilgrims, to say nothing of the quartermasters, the blame for the loss of the Penang must have been definitely placed on the shoulders of Benbow, for the little Sultan flew into furious rage, and the beefy, truculent skipper appeared very glad indeed to go below in evident disgrace.

So much for Benbow. The boat presently set out again for shore. With it was a second boat, that in which the quartermasters had departed the previous evening. Both were loaded deep with water casks, and at sight of them Stone drew back with a dancing light in his steely eyes.

"Good! He's going to victual and water those beggars until he can send for 'em, or until fishing boats can take 'em up the coast. He'll be here for an hour yet, and doubtless he'll search for me—or again, he may choose to leave me to starve. Very well, Mr. Sultan! I think your unknown friend the raja will now take a hand in the game. Wish I had a smoke!"

He had already solved in mind his chief problem—to get aboard the *proa*. Once he was there he could let matters take their course. Stone was a man who solved one puzzle at a time and left the rest to Providence.

Working swiftly, he tore loose vine after vine from the knotted tangles around him—great, piled shreds of wood, thick-leaved, and with lesser vines bound them so that they would not lightly drift apart. These he edged into the water under a mango tree, and shortly afterward followed the mass of seeming flotsam.

As the morning waxed and the boats continued taking supplies ashore, the tangled mass of drifted creepers worked out slowly but certainly toward the gaily bedizened *proa*, under whose awning Sultan Lumpur was smoking and, in very heathen fashion, mixing strong coffee with brandy-and-sodas. A nautch-girl had appeared like some gilded snake, and was smoking a white cheroot beside him on the cushions.

"Tell me," said the Sultan to Tan Tock, in English—partly because he affected the language and partly in order that the girl might not understand, "about this new man, Stone. Shall we pick him up and silence his mouth regarding this woman?"

"Favored of Allah, he is very well where he is," and Tan Tock grinned faintly. "From this place he cannot escape, and it is better to let him perish miserably here than to run any risks by slaying him outright. Why trouble, when God can do the work for us?"

"Very true," assented Lumpur sagely. "At least, he seems to be a man among men."

Tan Tock cast a troubled glance at the shore, not observing the tangle of vines that floated under the counter below.

"Aye, a man indeed! He would slay me as he slew Tuan Mickelson, were he here. However," and the steward brightened perceptibly, "he is unarmed and ashore. It might be well to bid these Malays hunt him down, while boats are coming for them."

"I will do it." His highness nodded, a trifle drowsily. "Do you go and lay out a very fine luncheon in the private suite—do not waken the woman, however; let her sleep until I am ready. Champagne, caviar, and all that sort of thing."

The port side of the boat, swinging lazily to her anchor, was deserted. The starboard side buzzed with activity as the brown seamen broke out the casks and provisions for the crowd ashore.

Down the starboard side floated the

tangle of vines. Floating beneath them with his head only half-submerged, Richard Stone grinned cheerfully to himself as he caught the conversation overhead, and gradually worked his way along to the stern of the *proa*. He dared not make haste, and the thought of possible nips from small sharks was a continual torment; none the less, he grinned. Things were not going so badly, after all! What had seemed a calamity, now in the light of events began to appear very much like good fortune after all—he would have had to face the Sultan in any event!

"All's for the best," thought Stone cheerily, "and the 'best' refers to one Dick Stone, Esq. What first seems misfortune proves to be good hap, so press on, O raja!"

Now, Stone's mental pose as the Raja of Hell Island was no mere jest. He strove to impress that pose upon himself sternly, without compromise, for his position and that of Agnes Bretton were desperate in the extreme. The only law was the will of Sultan Lumpus, who was well served, as Stone had found to his cost. Half-measures, consular appeals, empty threats, would effect nothing. Agnes Bretton could be saved only by the death of men—she could be saved only by one who would act in true Oriental fashion, high-handed and ruthless—the Raja of Hell Island. So this word, first spoken in jest, became deadly earnest, and Stone knew well that he himself would be erased like a Dongrek cobra in case he failed. Therefore, he had not the slightest intention of failure.

Reaching the stern of the *proa*, Stone found a broad, open window above him. The barge had been built for luxury, and was a floating palace of iniquity rather than a ship; the American conjectured that the private suite of which Sultan Lumpur had spoken was here in the stern.

Being quite hidden from any observation, Stone evaded his leafy screen, gripped the gilded carving above him, and drew himself out of the water. He

found himself gazing into a dining-room fitted in European style, and quite empty.

Five seconds later he was aboard.

CHAPTER V.

A GLASS OF WATER.

TAN TOCK came into the dining-room and glanced about him. With two opium pellets at work inside of him, his yellow features gave no sign of weariness after a sleepless night. Instead, he was very cheerful, and chattered aloud as he worked.

"Truly the things of a Sultan!" he observed as he took silver-gilt utensils from a cupboard and began to set the table—for two. "Very beautiful. As beautiful as that white woman's hair. Perhaps the Sultan will give her to me when he is tired of her—I must not forget to mention it to him. He will have her dressed like the women statues on the temple of Angkor Wat—ai, by Allah!"

He opened the wine locker and drew out champagne bottles. There was no ice, but Tan Tock had a simpler cooling system; he drew forth a bucket with long rope attached, put the bottles in the bucket, and lowered it from the stern window. The depths of the lagoon were hardly cold, but would serve at a pinch.

"Now we must have tinned meats. First, however, I must make ready her water—the woman must be made agreeable to the Sultan's wishes, of course!"

He set out glasses, filled them with mineral water, and into one glass put a drop of colorless fluid from a tiny vial, which he replaced in his belt. He chuckled evilly, and proceeded to get out the tins of meat and caviar.

"So she is sleeping, eh?" His furtive eyes flitted to a doorway before which hung a covering of broad-striped crimson silk, such as they weave in Kelantan. "Perhaps it might be permitted to look upon her, since she is an infidel woman and without shame—"

Tan Tock wiped his hands on his

sarong and stepped to the doorway, his yellow face suddenly wrinkled in evil lines. On either side of the door were pillars of carven teakwood, heavily gilded. His hand went out and caught the silken curtain to draw it aside—

But the silken curtain moved of itself. A long, naked white arm shot forth, and iron fingers clenched upon the throat of Tan Tock; behind the arm emerged the figure of Stone, grimly silent.

That first instant of surprise and terror was enough to give the American's terrible fingers a firm grip on the yellow man's throat. Unable to cry out or get help, seeing death leaping at him from those hard gray eyes, Tan Tock's hand flashed down and whipped for a knife, flame-bladed like a kris. So swift was the motion that Stone did not see the weapon until it seared across his naked breast, barely slitting the skin.

Then, wild rage upon him, surging with anger at this man who had balked him during the night, he swung up Tan Tock by the neck, one-handed, and dashed the steward's head against one of the carven teakwood pillars. There was a sound like an egg breaking, and the body of Tan Tock hung limp. The knife tinkled on the deck.

"Well," ejaculated Stone, surprised at the access of strength which had come upon him, and staring at the dragging figure, "what d'you know about that? Ugh—the beast must have had a skull like paper!"

Glancing around swiftly, Stone took a gold-mounted phonograph from a table in the corner, tied it to the feet of the body, and a moment later the steward was lowered from the stern window and disappeared in the lagoon.

Stone fingered the revolver he had found in the man's pocket, and shivered a little.

"Deadly work, this raja business!" he muttered. "Still, there's no help for it. It's not for yourself, Dick lad—it's for the little woman in yonder. So let her sleep, poor soul, while you have a look

around. Raja against Sultan, by the Lord!"

Whereupon, regarding all within reach as lawful loot, Stone proceeded to look around.

Sultan Lumpur was wealthy, and, like all Oriental rulers, desired to have evidences of his wealth about him in intrinsic shape. Thus his private suite was rich in gold mountings and costly things of all sorts; and set in the teak wall was a small but excellent safe. These things Stone disdained for the moment, settling himself at the table with a great sigh of contentment, for he was hungry. Of clothes there were none in sight, but food was in plenty, and the American determined to make the most of it.

Half an hour later he lighted a superfine cheroot from the Sultan's silver humidor, and with Tan Tock's knife absent-mindedly picked three superb rubies from the chased lid of the humidor itself.

"Now," he reflected, staring at the three blood-red flames on the table-cloth, "it is quite right that our petty Sultan should pay, and pay well, for the trouble which he causes the Raja of Hell Island, to say nothing of Miss Bretton! These are nice rubies, but I have no pockets to put them in—"

He came to his feet suddenly, listening. Then his lips curved grimly.

"Ah! Here come your pockets, Mr. Raja! I hope it's the Sultan himself."

He moved over to the door—not that covered by the silk hanging, but the one that led into the passageway without—and stood behind the teak door, revolver reversed in his hand. From the passage came a shuffle of steps, which paused at the door.

"Tan Tock?" spoke a voice. Stone grimaced. This was not the Sultan, but one of the two quartermasters who had come ashore with him from the Penang.

"Enter!" Stone muffled his voice; and the door, which boasted an excellent English lock, swung open.

The quartermaster appeared, staring

about the room in search of Tan Tock. Whatever his errand might have been, it remained undelivered, for Stone's revolver-butt struck him behind the ear, and the American's long arm caught him as he fell senseless.

"All things come to him who waits!" chuckled Stone.

Five minutes caused an appreciable alteration in appearances. The quartermaster sat, bound and gagged, in a corner, concealed but not stifled by a spare table-cloth. Clad in the neat blue uniform, Stone looked very much himself again, and carefully pocketed the three rubies. As he stood rubbing the stubble on his chin and gazing at the unconscious seaman, the very sunburst of an idea shot athwart his mind.

"Eh—by the Lord Harry!" he ejaculated admiringly. "I must have a genius for intrigue! If it could be done, now, it'd solve a whole lot of my troubles."

He turned to the table, quickly rid it of the remains of his own meal, then set it anew, opening the meats and making all ready that he could. The two glasses of water he transposed in place. Then, assuring himself that all looked fairly well, he pulled aside the curtain of crimson silk and knocked lightly at the door behind. There was a moment of silence—then came the response, as upon that first occasion which now seemed a century ago, when he had knocked at her door aboard the Penang.

"Yes? Who is there?"

"His excellency the Raja of Hell Island, ma'am," returned Stone gaily but guardedly. "Sorry to break into your nap, but—"

"Oh!" In her one word were expressed amazement, delighted recognition, and hasty greeting. Then: "Wait just a moment, please!"

"No hurry," Stone assured her. "Don't make much noise, though!"

"I sha'n't."

The word drew a little laugh from him, yet it was a laugh partially of shame. He himself would have said "won't," he re-

flected; in the past year he had fallen much away from the niceties of speech and action.

"Well, there's some excuse for it!" he muttered, glancing at the quartermaster and thinking of Tan Tock. "These brown beggars are used to monkeying with French and Britishers; now they've tackled Americans, they'll find out a few things, grammar or not. If we pull out of this mess, they'll remember one raja, anyhow!"

He slipped the lock of the door leading to the passage. A moment later the other door opened and showed Miss Bretton, slightly disheveled, her pale cheeks tinged with rich color, her deep-gray eyes alight.

"Oh!" she said, smiling. "I thought —Tan Tock told me you had gone away!"

"Sure! But I came back. Tan Tock's gone away this time. Here, come in and sit down. How'd you like the Sultan?"

"He—he seemed very polite." She sank into the chair Stone placed for her. "Really, it is very hard to think that there is anything wrong—"

"Still doubting, eh?" Stone chuckled, and pointed to the glasses of water. "Tan Tock came in and laid this table a few minutes ago. In one of those glasses —this one at the seat by the window—he put a drop of liquid, intending it for you. Had you taken luncheon with the Sultan, you would have been drugged before you knew it. Now, then, I'll proceed to give you ample proof of what I say, Miss Bretton. Get the Sultan to drink that glass of water!"

"What?" She stared at him, frowning slightly. "I don't see how—"

"Oh, I'll show you how!" cut in Stone cheerfully, taking another cheroot from the humidor. "I've an almighty good little scheme cooked up, if we can put it over. You must remember that Sultan Lumpur comes of a long line of piratical ancestors, and you must pay attention to his admissions; then you'll

have no further scruples, I hope. Also, I must depend entirely upon you to keep his attention occupied while I think up some plan for getting away from this craft."

She made a helpless gesture.

"I'm afraid I don't understand you very clearly, Mr. Stone."

"Sure you don't!" Stone laughed. "Please tuck up that curling strand of hair that hangs over your ear—it's the most distractingly attractive thing I ever saw in my life! Well, now, I'll explain."

Her slim hands went to her hair; her pale cheeks reddened again in a blush that was half a smile. Stone explained.

The original proprietors of Hell Island, as Stone reflected, were undoubtedly pirates and freebooters; for after this manner lived all Malays in the old days. So, once in the bedroom of the private suite, he looted a fine silk shirt of the Sultan's, split it a little in getting it over his shoulders, knotted a loud scarlet scarf about his throat, opened the door that led into the dining-room behind the silk curtain, and then sat down to think. While he thought, Miss Bretton acted.

The morning was drawing well on toward noon as she emerged on deck and stood looking about her. Where the lagoon had been gray with stormy fear on the previous day, it was now glittering with tropic warmth; even the gray stones of Hell Island were jeweled with scarlet flowers and flashing parakeets. The boats had ceased work and now hung listless at the gangway ladder, and the crew were idly draped about the deck forward.

Beneath the awning, Sultan Lumpur had just wakened. At sight of Miss Bretton he sent the nautch-girl away with a snarling oath; but if Miss Bretton had been convinced of the Sultan's entirely civilized state, that conviction was sadly shaken. The nautch-girl was not naked, in a technical sense; yet it was with some reason that the lips of Agnes Bretton were firmly compressed.

The ruler of Kuala Gajah hastened to make amends.

"Eh, up already, Miss Bretton? You're looking perfectly ripping, if I may say so!" The Sultan's English was pronouncedly English. Beneath his fez his small-boned, preternaturally aged brown features looked like weathered rosewood studded with white ivories. "Take this chair—let me sit at your feet and smoke, if I may."

"No, I won't sit down, thank you." Miss Bretton delicately stifled a yawn. "I looked in on your dining-room, and it positively made me ravenous! By the way, Sultan, have you made any plans as to a mission station at Kuala Gajah?"

Sultan Lumpur looked slightly taken aback.

"My word! Aren't you awfully keen on business, eh?" He grinned disagreeably. "Come, let us go down and assuage our hunger, and over the table we will discuss the mission. I hope Tan Tock did not waken you?"

"No."

Refusing his proffered arm, Miss Bretton returned down the companionway, Lumpur at her heels. At the bottom, she turned as if she had forgotten something.

"Oh—when are you going to leave here, Sultan? Soon, I hope?"

"In an hour, Miss Bretton." He bowed, bobbing absurdly in his frock coat. "Some of my crew are going ashore immediately to find a fishing village, in order that the castaways on the island may secure boats at once. Upon their return we leave for Kuala Gajah."

She nodded and passed on into the dining-room.

Stone, in the bedroom off the private suite, stuffed some small plush boxes into his jacket pockets and, upon hearing the Sultan's explanation of their continued stay, went to the door that opened on the passage. Miss Bretton and the Sultan entered the dining-room.

Here, opening on the passage, there were four other cabins, the doors closed. Stone concluded they were occupied by

Benbow and the nautch-girls, and he slipped softly down to the companion. Very cautiously venturing up the ladder, he heard the rattle of oars, and after a moment raised his head sufficiently to see that a boat had set off, not toward the island, but toward the river-mouth across the lagoon. The boat was of the Penang, with ten men in her, and was commanded by the other quartermaster who had come ashore with Stone.

"Good!" The American returned up the passage and softly regained the bedroom of the private suite. "Counting the Penang's men who slipped away from me last night, there were only a dozen aboard here this morning. Ten gone leaves two, and Benbow will snore until night if he's left alone. Now let's see how things are going next door."

He sank into a gilded Empire chair and listened, chuckling a little to himself.

Being so far accustomed to titles that they bored him, Sultan Lumpur appeared to be keenly enjoying Miss Bretton's absence of formality and quietly poised bearing. Indeed, he was so interested that so far he had failed to remark the absence either of Tan Tock or the gold-mounted phonograph.

From the sound of voices, Stone gathered that Miss Bretton sat near the door, while the Sultan sat by the stern window; thus all presaged well regarding the glasses of water. A moment later, indeed, Stone knew that the deed was done.

"My word, this water tastes warm!" exclaimed the Sultan. "It's beastly odd where Tan Tock can be. Would you mind pressing that bell at your hand, Miss Bretton—"

"Then you don't care for a *tête-à-tête*?" she inquired, the slightest hint of reproach in her voice. Stone swore admiringly to himself; he had not dreamed that she held such qualities of an actress! The Sultan did not dream so, either, and fell at once to the lure.

"By all means, my dear lady. Now let us have a bottle of this wine. Do you know, Miss Bretton, it makes me

very happy indeed to be thus dining with you—to have been the means of rescuing you from an unhappy predicament! It is a great honor, indeed—”

“Thank you,” broke in the girl quietly. “What kind of a mission church did you think of erecting, Sultan Lumpur?”

“Any kind you prefer, dear lady!” retorted the Sultan gaily. “And it shall contain a shrine with a statue of yourself done in gold and jewels, eh? Oh, yes! I am not too orthodox a Mohammedan, you see; nor do I deny myself the beautiful things that nature craves, whether it be wine—or—or hair more beautiful than gold!”

It was self-evident that the words of his highness were no idle compliments. With every instant the man was letting his inner self crack through the veneer of politeness and civilization, and Stone could imagine the leer upon the brown features.

There now came the signal for which the American had been waiting—the signal that the drugged glass of water was gone.

“I met a very interesting man on this island,” observed Miss Bretton, her tone a trifle unsteady despite her self-control.

“Yes?” returned the oily voice of the other. “Not so interesting as I, perhaps.”

“Possibly you know him, Sultan Lumpur. He called himself the raja of this island here—he was a very interesting man, indeed—”

“Raja? Raja of Jehannum Island?” broke out Sultan Lumpur, between surprise and rage. Stone softly rose and stepped to the curtain at the door. “My word! What bally impudence was the beggar handing you?”

“None, I assure you! He was a very nice man, and he was very kind to me.”

“Oh, was he?” An ugly note surcharged the Sultan’s voice—perhaps he was tiring of the game, thought Stone with a grin. “Well, he’ll not be so nice to you as I’ll be, my dear young lady! How would it suit you to be a Sultana—

eh, what? With women to wait upon you, and diamonds to wear, and all Kuala Gajah at your beck and call, eh?”

He was giving himself away very nicely now. Then, to Stone’s surprise, Miss Bretton made reply with an icy firmness.

“You forget yourself! Sit down in that chair and stop leering across the table—just remember that you’re speaking to a white woman, Mr. Sultan!”

“Indeed?” Sultan Lumpur gave vent to a cackle of evil mirth. “Did that glass of water taste odd to you, Miss Bretton? There was a drop of liquid in it—and in a very few minutes you will be sound asleep. And what then, eh? Perhaps to-morrow you’ll forget you’re a boasted white woman, eh? Perhaps you’ll be glad to be a Sultana, eh, what? My word! Does it surprise you to find all the refinements of civilization here in the Malay States, eh?”

“You vile beast!” bit out the girl’s voice. “Don’t you dare use such words to me—”

“Ho! And why not, my dear?” said the Sultan thickly. “Why not? Who’ll stop me?”

“The Raja of Hell Island,” said Stone. “Consider yourself stopped, Sultan!”

CHAPTER VI.

MERELY A LITTLE PRESENT.

“LAY ‘em flat out on the table,” continued the American pleasantly. “Yes, that’s right. Very pretty hands, Sultan! Keep ‘em there. Satan will find mischief still—eh?”

Stone came to the table edge, his revolver staring at the Sultan, who was stupefied by this unexpected apparition. Miss Bretton sat stiffly in her chair, her face very white and her gray eyes blazing with anger.

“I hope you’re satisfied about your host, Miss Bretton?”

“Oh!” She flushed deeply. “I—I didn’t know there could be such men in the world!”

"No, he isn't a man at all." Stone inspected the staring brown face curiously. "He's merely a snake—or a spider, if you like. This pretty boat seems to be a regular parlor, but this time he's caught a wasp instead of a fly; a wasp, *Genus Americanus*. Feeling better, Sultan? Let's have a chat."

"Damn you!" Sultan Lumpur's voice lashed out venomously. "How dare you—"

"I dare do all that may become a man!" chuckled Stone. "If I press this trigger, you'll be sorry; so keep your voice down. There's no one aboard to help you, anyway, since that boat pulled off. Give me half a chance and I'll put a bullet in you, Sultan!"

Lumpur, for all the foaming rage that possessed him, seemed unaccountably lethargic. He peered at Stone from bloodshot eyes; his brown fingers clawed at the table-cloth convulsively; and when he spoke again, a moment later, his voice was thick and blurred.

"Oh! You're the man Stone, eh, what? I say, don't be a bally ass, old chap!"

Stone grinned. "Just at present I'm a bloomin' raja, old top—and you mind your eye! No, I'll not hurt you unless you make me; so rest easy. That's right; if you feel sleepy, go right ahead; never mind us—"

"Oh, what's the matter with him?" cried Miss Bretton sharply, her voice thin with swift alarm and anxiety.

For Sultan Lumpur had suddenly bowed his head as though a heavy weight were forcing him down; his cheek went to the table-cloth between his outstretched arms, and with closed eyes he lay motionless, save for the stertorous breathing that heaved his slight frame.

"H-m! He drank that glass of water meant for you, and it works mighty fast," explained Stone dryly. "Still, he may be shamming. You sit still for a moment—"

He stepped around the table, shoved his revolver into Sultan Lumpur's ribs,

and with his left hand drew back the royal eyelid. There was no doubt whatever about it. His highness was drugged to sleep, and was quite beyond any immediate awakening.

"Safe in the arms of Murphy, as the Dutchman said," observed Stone, stowing away his revolver with a sigh of relief. He leaned over the table, and from various parts of the frock-coated person removed an ivory-handled knife and a beautiful little gold-mounted revolver. This last he shoved across to Miss Bretton.

"Take this and stow it away—you may need it, and if not, it'll be a souvenir of the happy occasion. Here, take this glass of wine; you really do need that, Miss Bretton, and some food, too. The excitement's all over, 'pon my word!"

She obeyed him, smiling faintly. The American again leaned over the Sultan and deftly removed two blazing diamonds from scarf and finger, correctly adjusting them upon his own person. Then, drawing up a chair, he dumped from the pocket some small plush cases.

"What on earth are those?" inquired the watching girl curiously.

"Souvenirs." Stone grinned and opened the cases, to display a collection of jeweled orders and decorations. With a knife he began to dig methodically at the jewels, littering the table with yellow and red and green spots of flame.

"Fine stones, too, Miss Bretton! He should have kept them in the safe—"

"You're—why, Mr. Stone, you're not stealing them?"

"Eh—stealing them?" Stone glanced at her in surprise. "Not on your life! See here, do you actually imagine—*could* you imagine—that I'm a thief?"

"No," she returned, hesitant, her deep-gray eyes searching his. "But—"

"No buts at all. Right!" broke in Stone cheerfully. "I'll explain, Miss Bretton. There's a poor, no-account American whom I know—a decent fellow in his way, but who's had a string of

hard luck lately. In fact, he's down and out financially. Now, then, this Sultan Lumpur has done him a very scurvy trick indeed; has forced him to starve and fight and do a whole lot of things he doesn't like, and finally decided, only a little while ago, to maroon this American chap and set a bunch of crazy Malays on him—in short, to murder him. Well, I have saved the American, and I'm going to turn over these jewels as a little present from Sultan Lumpur, to repay him in part and to set him on his feet again. Don't you think it's right?"

"Why—yes, perhaps it is," she admitted slowly. "Who's this American?"

"A fellow named Dick Stone. And I'm the Raja of Hell Island!" said Stone calmly. "Now please go on and eat something, Miss Bretton. We're not out of the woods yet, and no matter whether or not you want to eat, it's a physical necessity."

At his words she flushed, eyed him a moment in indecision, and then obeyed.

Whistling between his teeth, Stone finished his task, tossed the silver and gold settings out of the stern window, and swept the little pile of jewels into his pocket. Then he rose and stretched himself, yawning.

"I beg your pardon—a raja sometimes forgets himself, Miss Bretton! Now, I've a bit of work for you to do in my absence, if you don't mind."

Her eyes leaped to him, suddenly startled.

"You—you are going away?"

"Just out on deck." Stone nodded reassurance, took from the humidor another cheroot and lighted it. "You see, we have to make arrangements to get safely away from here, Miss Bretton, and we have just so much time in which to get away."

"But—" The girl's eyes went to the figure of Sultan Lumpur in mute remonstrance.

"Don't worry about him. He'll not wake up for an hour or two at least, and I have reasons for leaving him just where

he is. In case anything unexpected happens, remember the neat little revolver I handed you. While I'm gone, now, I'd be greatly obliged if you'd get all the provisions out of these lockers you can find, and pile 'em up under that stern window. A dozen bottles of mineral water, too, and a couple of whisky against emergencies. Can you do this for me?"

"Of course!" she answered quietly. "I only wish I could do more, Mr. Stone. It's terrible to realize all that's happened, and to know that—that you have done so much beyond words to thank you for—"

Stone leaned across the table, and she put her hand in his. For a moment he gazed down at her slender, lightly tanned fingers, and the harshness died out of his features, and when he lifted his eyes to hers the steely depths of them were humid.

"God knows I want no thanks, Agnes Bretton!" he said huskily. "Just to have known you—I never met a woman like you before in the world—"

He rose suddenly and strode from the cabin, went out into the passageway and shut the door behind him. For a space he stood there, striving to get himself in hand once more. He was seething with a riot of emotions—emotions that gripped and whirled him off his secure pedestal of poise. Agnes Bretton seemed to have twined among his very heart-strings, tugging at them with a great grief and sweetness and wonderful surge of feeling which was unnameable.

Two days previously he had never dreamed of such a thing as this—such love as this! It was love, he admitted savagely to himself. Although it might seem incredible, he felt that in these scant two days he had lived a century with this gray-eyed girl; she had entered into his life suddenly, completely, sweeping him away like a withered leaf in the blast. And Dick Stone was not a man easily swept away.

"And think what she's just been through, with never a sign of break!"

He swore softly in sheer admiration. "A girl facing veritable hell, escaping it by an eyelash, and keeping just as cool as I am—"

He did not know that at this very moment Agnes Bretton was emptying the locker with tears streaming down her cheeks, with a desperate little prayer for strength on her lips.

Then, swiftly, Stone's iron will swept all thought of her out of his mind, and grimly tensed himself to the work in hand. It was nearly done now, he reflected; the worst of the work lay behind, and if the Raja of Hell Island could play out the game *sans faiblesse*, Dick Stone would yet win clear. But there must be no false move, no trifling!

Before him Stone eyed the four cabin doors, two on either hand—the entire after-space of the *proa* aside from the Sultan's private suite. Jerking out his revolver, the American stepped to the nearest door and shoved it open. The cabin was empty.

He passed on to the next. Under his grip the handle refused to give—the door was locked! A soft voice sounded in Malay, and Stone remembered the naught-girl.

"Open!" he snapped.

The catch snicked back, and the door swung open. To his surprise, Stone saw two of the girls facing him—two slim brown things, frightened in their eyes, gazing out at him as a trapped *nilgai* deer gazes upon the hunters.

"You understand English?" said Stone. "Then be quiet. Lock your door until the Sultan calls for you, and keep quiet! That's all."

He drew the door to, and heard the lock click.

But, at the same moment, as though the sound of his voice had caused the movement, Stone heard the creak of hinges behind. He whirled, catlike. In the cabin door directly opposite that of the two girls, standing staring at him like a fat and surprised elephant, was Captain Benbow of the Penang!

Instantly, Stone's revolver bored into Benbow's fat pauch, and Stone's eyes shone into those of the Englishman like gray agates.

"You fat fool! This boat's in my hands. D'you want to die in a hurry?"

"Oh, come, Stone!" exclaimed the astounded Benbow, who had seemingly just weakened from sleep, and was but half-dressed. "Let by-gones be by-gones, eh, what? You did for poor Mickelson—well, that was his own fault, I take it." Benbow licked his fat lips, and fear sat in his roving eyes. "Come, Stone, chuck it! No hard feelings—"

"Oh, shut up!" snarled the American harshly. "I'll do you like I did Mickelson if you don't keep your fat head where it belongs. But I don't want any more fighting. By the Lord Harry, I've had my bellyful this trip! This craft belongs to me, savvy? Have you any objections to proffer?"

"Here, you can't come that over me—" Stone's finger moved on the trigger, and the bluster of Benbow died abruptly into nothing. "No, of course not, Stone! You—you're able to handle her, of course. Deuced good chap—no hard feelings, eh, what?"

Stone's eyes spat forth contempt.

"You're a damned dirty scoundrel, Benbow, and I ought to put a bullet into you. But that's more than I can stomach. Get into your cabin and stay there. Mind, stay there! If you come poking out, you'll stop lead. I'm running this hooker—get!"

Benbow vanished hastily and slammed the door. Having no means of fastening it, Stone trusted that the skipper's amazement and fear would hold him prisoner, and passed on to the fourth door. That cabin proved to be empty.

Turning, Stone sought the companion-way.

"Expecting to take Miss Bretton aboard, Sultan Lumpur stowed his girls in that cabin—and they'll stay there safe enough," he reflected. "Well, it looks as if all was secure below, granted Ben-

bow lies *perdu* for a while. The next question is about the boats. Which of the two Penang boats did those fellows take when they went across the lagoon to the river mouth? If my boat's here, the one that slipped off and brought Sultan Lumpur, then luck is with me for once."

Unhesitant now, sure that all was clear, he advanced up the ladder and sprang to the deck above.

It seemed that he had been below decks for hours unnumbered; yet now he realized that it had been only a matter of minutes since his last look above—not an hour in all. The boat had vanished in the mainland marshes at the mouth of the river. Along the ancient island wharves the pilgrim castaways were chanting their noonday prayer, their singsong voices lifting the *sura* vibrantly over the water and the old ruins.

The two men who had been left aboard the *proa* were seamen from the Penang. Brazenly neglectful of prayers, they were sitting on the bulwarks amidships, eagerly watching two fishing lines which they had put over into the water. Stone grinned at sight of them.

"*Di sini, tu!*" His voice bit out like a whiplash. "Here, you! *Marilah!* Come!"

They jumped as though a veritable whip had flecked across their brown backs. Leaping up, they stood in amaze at sight of the American, whose revolver covered them.

"Tuan Stone!"

"Tuan Stone, you bet. Get over to the mast—jump, you dogs! *Lakas!* Throw your knives on the deck—that's very good. One of you put your arms around the mast—no, clear around—that's it! Now, you other boy, tie his wrists."

With the wrists of one Malay securely bound together, Stone made the second seaman embrace the mast likewise, sitting on the deck, and lashed the brown wrists in turn. Then he pocketed his revolver, chuckling grimly.

"When that boat comes back, boys, tell 'em that the Raja of Hell Island cap-

tured you. Savvy? I'm going to take Sultan Lumpur away on a little trip, so don't worry about him. This is what you get for forgetting your noonday prayers —eh?"

He crossed the deck to the gangway ladder, where a boat swung by its painter. Leaning over, Stone saw to his delight that it was the same boat he had prepared on the Penang—the same in which he had come ashore. Lashed to the thwarts was the mast with the sail wrapped around it, two oars atop of all.

"Good!" exclaimed Stone exultantly. "The game's won!"

The painter in his hand, he towed the boat aft to the high, carved stern of the *proa*. There, because of the gilded carving that jutted out, he was unable to see the stern window below, but sent his voice ringing down in a cheerful hail.

"Miss Bretton! All well?"

"Yes!" The answer floated up. "Where are you?"

"On deck above. Try and catch this line, will you?"

Leaning far over, he swung the loose end of the painter in below him. At the third attempt it was caught and held.

"All right. I have it!"

"Hang on to it until I get down, then," responded the American.

He swiftly regained the companionway and slipped below. The doors of the passage were closed, and Stone did not think it worth while to intimidate Benbow further. He hastened on to the end door, flung it open—and at sight of Miss Bretton at the stern window, quite forgot to lock the door after him.

"Bully for you!" Smiling, Stone took the painter from her and hooked the knotted end in the gilded carving. "Now, let's get our freight in. You're willing to take a little boat ride, I hope? Back to civilization?"

"Willing!" She laughed, a trifle hysterically. "Oh, can we?"

"Upon the honor of a raja, ma'am! In ten minutes this breeze will be sending us over the bar, and in twenty minutes

we'll be spanking south on the briny deep! Here goes."

He lifted the limp figure of Sultan Lumpur by the collar, shoved the body royal through the window, and dropped it pitilessly into the bow of the boat below.

"Taking him as a hostage for a while," he explained briefly. "Now, if you'll get down into the boat yourself, I'll pass you the provisions."

"Thank you," she said simply, taking his hand.

Very carefully Stone helped her through the window and lowered her into the wide stern-sheets of the boat. Then he handed down the bottled water and provisions, directing her how to stow them in the boat locker and between the thwarts, and last of all sent down the Sultan's humidor of fine cheroots.

"Just a minute, now!"

Darting into the royal bedroom, Stone seized whatever pillows and quilts came to hand, and sent them down to make a comfortable nest for the girl behind the after-thwart. Then, bidding her unlash the mast and oars, Stone turned about for his final move.

Crossing to the door, he uncovered the knocked-out quartermaster and dragged the bound and gagged man to the stern window, bidding him stand upright and look down at the boat underneath.

"Now, then," he said, turning the Malay toward himself again, "you see that I am going away, and that Sultan Lumpur is in my power?"

The quartermaster nodded.

"Good. You'll be released in an hour, when the other quartermaster comes back with that boat. You tell him, and tell Tuan Benbow likewise, that if you attempt to pursue us, I'll shoot Sultan Lumpur at first sight of you—savvy? Good. Stay here until sunset, then go on south with the *proa* and put in at Kuala Tengore; you ought to reach it early in the morning. You'll find Sultan Lumpur there waiting for you, safe and unhurt—I give you my word as to that. But if

you try to follow, he'll be the first to die. All set?"

The Malay nodded. Stone knew that in their implicit loyalty these men would not risk the threat carried into effect, and that they would not allow Benbow to overrule them. The *proa* would remain where she was until evening.

"Here, sit down and be out of my way—"

Stone was just pushing the bound Malay into the nearest chair, to clear his own way through the window, when he saw the man's eyes dart suddenly to the door of the passage behind him. Almost subconsciously, he sensed danger—and dropped to the floor like a plummet, gripping at his revolver.

As he dropped, the deafening burst of a revolver-shot filled the cabin. Twisting about on the floor, Stone saw the portly figure of Benbow in the doorway, weapon in hand. The wily skipper had slipped unobserved to the door, and his deliberate attempt at murder had been thwarted only by the startled glance of the bound quartermaster.

Even as these thoughts flitted through Stone's brain, his finger pressed the trigger of his own revolver. Benbow, who had been peering forward for a second shot, dropped his weapon and clapped both hands to his chest; then, the life stricken mutely out of him, his knees loosened and he sank to the deck.

"Inefficient—inefficient to the last!" muttered Stone, rising and frowning at the skipper's body in sudden cold anger. "You couldn't even shoot me down from behind—Lord knows I tried to keep from this—"

He whirled, slipped lithely through the window, jerked loose the painter, and dropped down into the boat. Miss Bretton caught and steadied him, staring at him from a pallid face.

"What—what was that shooting? No trouble, surely?"

"No, no trouble." Stone laughed grimly and stepped across the thwarts to the mast. "It was merely an accident."

And, under his breath he added, "An accident of inefficiency!"

CHAPTER VII.

EXIT THE RAJA.

THE Penang's boat was dancing merrily to the south, Stone at the tiller. Beside him was Agnes Bretton, freshly wakened from her nap on the pillows, and now engaged in pinning up her hair against the breeze.

Just abaft the mast sat Sultan Lumpur, the greenish hue that mottled his brown face making him look very much like the great jade Hanuman that sits in the Meilmun shrine. He had never been abroad in an open ship's boat before, and felt extremely uncomfortable.

Off to the right was the line of coast mountains, purple as royal amethyst under the setting sun that was lowering itself behind their crests. The rest was wind and sea—sea that slavered blood-scarlet under the sunset skies, the white-tipped waves combing up at the flying boat like the water-fingers of an Hiroshige print.

Stone looked into the girl eyes and laughed.

"Going home! Feeling better, eh? This wind is whipping color into your cheeks, and no mistake! Where'll I drop you—New York, Boston, Chicago, Frisco—"

"Nowhere at all!" cried the girl gaily. "This is wonderful, wonderful! Oh, that lagoon seems like an evil dream—"

"Look here!" Stone's left hand crept over the tiller and caught hers, compelling her eyes to lift to his. "Look here, Agnes! I don't know anything about you—except *you*; and that's enough. The past two days have been like a thousand years to me, girl—but tell me one thing, please. Is—is there any one waiting for you at home, or out here?"

"Any one waiting?" She gazed into his eyes for a moment, uncomprehending; then her eyes widened suddenly.

"Oh! You mean like that—no, no!" In her gray eyes was alarm, yet she did not try to free herself from Stone's grip.

"Then I can tell you that I want you—that I love you!" he said almost fiercely. "Will you marry me? After we get out of all this, after we get back to civilization and the prosaic ways of our own kind—after all this, will you marry me? God knows I love you with all my heart, little woman! I believe I've loved you from that first moment I stepped into your cabin on the Penang and looked into your eyes! Can you give up the missionary work and all that—can you go home with me, Dick Stone? Or can't you?"

She gazed into his eyes, paling. She seemed unable to speak. Then suddenly her eyes flitted forward, and color surged again into her cheeks.

"Not—not with him—there!" She nodded toward the drooping figure of Sultan Lumpur. "If he were out of sight—it would be so different—"

"Oh—*him!*" In contempt Stone swung his voice forward. "You—Sultan! Crawl back here. I want to speak with you. Move lively, you swine! Crawl!"

Lumpur crawled, in terrible fright. Stone reached forward a moment later and with one hand perked the man partially upright on the thwart.

"Now listen well, Sultan Lumpur! We'll be in Kuala Trengore before dawn to-morrow—with the British resident, savvy? Your cursed barge will call for you there to-morrow, and the best thing you can do is to wait for it and go away from there in a confounded hurry, keeping your mouth shut. Understand? You'd better! Once let the story get out about how Miss Bretton came at your urging, and what happened betwixt you and her—and the British would put a new Sultan at Kuala Gajah. Eh? You're darned right they would!"

"Well, no British are handling this. You keep your mouth shut and you'll get out scot free. This time, my bucko,

you've tried to dance a jig with the American eagle, haven't you?" Stone shook the little man savagely. "Huh! Well, you've learned something about Americans that 'll hold you for some while, I guess. You'd better be blamed grateful that I, the Raja of Hell Island, don't sling you overboard and let you swim to perdition. I ought to do it, by the Lord Harry!"

Sultan Lumpur looked at the cresting waves and uttered a prayer to Allah.

"Now get for'ard and stay there—plumb up in the bow!" commanded Stone, releasing him. "When I get ready I'll pass you up some biscuit and water. Stay up there, and stay shut up, and if you dare make any complaint when we get to Kuala Trengore I'll take the hide off your measly body and make it into a snare-drum. Hike!"

Sultan Lumpur limply made his way forward of the mast. Once in the bows, he collapsed, and stayed collapsed. His ancestors had been pirates, but the active motion of a small boat in a brisk sea will cause even piratical blood to become squeamish. Sultan Lumpur was decided-

ly squeamish—very seasick indeed, to put it bluntly. He was also very sick of mind, because he knew that this infidel spoke the truth; there would be a new Sultan in Kuala Gajah if the British heard the story of Miss Bretton.

"Now," said Stone briefly, "he's out of sight."

"You're exceedingly ferocious—sometimes!" observed Miss Bretton. "Wouldn't you hate to have a wife who would be so terribly afraid of you all the time—as I am?"

The words drove fear into Stone's heart.

"No," he responded thickly. "No. That was the Raja of Hell Island speaking to the Sultan. The raja's dead, Miss Bretton—Dick Stone isn't that sort at all, not with—with you—"

He turned then and looked into her laughing, flushed face, and finally understood.

Then the boat almost jibed, and rushed on into the tropic night with the happiness of souls at her tiller; and with Kama, the god of love, watching over her as she fled into the south.

(The end.)



A N O T H E R S O N G

BY GLENN WARD DRESBACH

THREE is a glad road leading
To hills where west winds go,
With songs for hearts that listen
Where wild hill-flowers grow.

There lives all earth-born rapture;
No spirit waits in vain
The magic of the moonlight,
The nectar of the rain.

And one I know will follow
With me the road, that long
Has waited for its lovers;
And—that's another song!

The Film of Fear

by Arnold Fredericks

SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS

RUTH MORTON, a motion-picture favorite, receives through the mail a letter threatening that within thirty days her beauty will be destroyed. Later her mother finds in her room another letter containing the words, "*Only twenty-nine days more.*" Without consulting Ruth, Mrs. Morton enlists the aid of Richard Duvall, who takes up the case. He finds that Ruth has no known enemies; that the room in which the letter is found is seemingly inaccessible, and that the two old servants are not only trustworthy, but devoted to Ruth. Nevertheless, while he is in the apartment another letter is found on the floor of Ruth's room. Mystified, but groping for clues, he goes to the motion-picture studio, where he, posing as a newspaperman, is present when a package containing a photograph of Ruth, disfigured as she is to look, is received. Still in the guise of a reporter, he starts back to the city with Ruth and her mother in their car.

CHAPTER VI.

THE DISFIGURED PHOTOGRAPH.

DUVALL'S ride back to town with Mrs. Morton and Ruth was quite uneventful. The latter, as she had explained, was ill, weak, indisposed to talk. Duvall and Mrs. Morton kept up a brisk conversation upon topics of the day, but both knew that it was of the girl they were thinking, and their interest in the subjects they discussed was clearly forced. Both were glad when the car at last stopped before the apartment building, and the long ride was over.

Mrs. Morton invited Duvall to come in and dine with them, and he promptly accepted. Ruth seemed indifferent. Assisted by her maid, she left the car and on reaching the apartment, at once went to her room.

"You will excuse me, I know," she said to Duvall. "I am tired out, and think I had better lie down at once. Nora will bring me some dinner," she said, turning to her mother.

Duvall and Mrs. Morton ate their dinner in silence. Some sense of oppression, of impending evil, hung over them both. Mrs. Morton left the table toward the close of the meal, and went to her daughter's room. With the solicitude of the typical mother she arranged the windows. That opening to the fire escape she raised to its full height. The one facing upon the court she left as it was, raised some six or eight inches. Then she returned to the library, where Duvall sat smoking a cigar.

"Ruth has gone to bed," she told him. "Both the windows in her room are open, the one on the fire-escape wide, the other partly raised."

Duvall looked at her with an expression of doubt.

"I think it would be better, for the present," he said, "to close and fasten the one opening on the fire escape. We cannot tell to what danger your daughter may be exposed."

Mrs. Morton rose and left the room.

"I will do as you advise," she said. Going to Ruth's bedroom she closed and fastened the window in question, then she went back to the library.

"Have you hit upon any theory to account for the sending of these letters?" she asked.

Duvall shook his head.

"The whole thing is very mysterious," he said. "Of course it was easy enough for any one to leave the photograph at the studio this afternoon. In fact it might readily have been done by one of the other actresses, who might be jealous of your daughter's success. But if the thing was done by someone employed at the studio, how can we account for the message left in the bedroom at half-past nine this morning, the one we found on the floor? If the woman who is responsible for these threats was at the studio this morning, how could she arrange to have the note left in your daughter's bedroom here at the same hour? That would seem to imply a confederate. I confess that the entire matter is for the moment beyond me."

"Were you able to find out anything concerning the telegram which came this morning?"

"Nothing, except that it was sent by a woman. I was not surprised to learn that. Naturally I should expect that a woman was responsible for these threats. But what woman? That is the question." He sat for a long time, thinking, his eyes fixed upon the floor.

Suddenly there came a ring at the doorbell. Mrs. Morton, without waiting for the maid, sprang to the hall, with Duvall close at her heels. As she threw it open, they saw a man in the doorway. Duvall was the first to recognize their caller.

"How do you do, Mr. Baker," he said, holding out his hand.

Mr. Baker came in, and greeted Mrs. Morton.

"I didn't expect to find Mr. Duvall here," he said. "In fact, I came to you to get his hotel address. Luckily I won't need it, now."

"Anything new?" Duvall asked, as they returned to the library.

"Nothing much. I got those samples of the writing of the various typewriters, as you requested," Baker replied, "and I thought that instead of waiting until to-morrow, it would be better to bring them to you to-night." He took a sheaf of papers from his pocket. "There are thirty-two in all. What are you going to do with them?" He placed the papers in Duvall's hand.

The latter sat down at the library table and placed the sheets of paper before him.

"Of course you know," he said to Baker, "that every typewriting machine has its unmistakable peculiarities. It is almost impossible to find a machine that has been used at all, that has not developed certain individual defects, or qualities, found in no other machine. Now let us take for instance the letters that Miss Morton has received during the past few days. They have all been written on the same machine, and I am of the opinion that it is a fairly old one. While going down to the studio this afternoon, I worked out and wrote down in my notebook the particular features which appear in all these letters." He took a small leather-covered book from his pocket.

"In the first place," he said, "the letter 'a' throughout the several communications is always found to be out of line. The key-bar is doubtless a trifle bent. Let us, therefore, see if, in any of the samples you have brought me, there exists a similar defect."

He took the samples of writing, one by one, and after scrutinizing them carefully, passed them over to Baker, who likewise subjected them to a critical examination. When their work was completed, it was

found that of the thirty-two samples, the displacement of the letter "a" occurred in but three, and in one of these it was so slight as to be scarcely noticeable. Duvall laid the three pages to one side.

"A second fault shown in the typewriting of the letters," he said, "is to be found in the capital 'W.' Its lower right hand corner has been worn or broken off, so that it invariably fails to register." He handed one of the letters to Baker. "See here, and here. The corner of the 'W' instead of being clear and distinct, is blunt and defective. Let us see whether a similar fault is to be found in any one of these three samples." He picked up the three sheets of paper that he had placed to one side.

As he examined them, Mr. Baker and Mrs. Morton saw a shadow of disappointment cross his face. He handed the three pages to Baker.

"The threatening letters were not written on any machine at your studio," he said.

Baker took the pages and looked them over carefully.

"No," he said at length. "You are right. None of these show the second defect you have named."

"Well," observed Duvall cheerfully, "we have accomplished something, at least. We know that these letters were not written at the studio, and it seems reasonably certain that the woman we are looking for has a typewriter in her rooms, or wherever she may live. Of course she might have had the typewriting done by some public stenographer, but I consider it unlikely. A person sending threats of this character would not be apt to entrust so dangerous a secret to a third person. We must therefore make up our minds to find a woman who has a typewriting machine, and knows how to use it."

"There are probably a hundred thousand such women in New York," Baker observed, gloomily.

"No doubt. But we have more information than that about the person who sent these letters."

"What, for instance?" asked Baker and Mrs. Morton in a breath.

"Well, in the first place, this woman was able to secure possession of a photograph of Miss Morton." He took the hideously distorted picture from his pocket. "Do either of you know where this photograph was made?"

Mrs. Morton examined the picture with a shudder. Then she rose, went to a cabinet at the other end of the room, and took out an album. Returning to the table, she placed the book before her, and began to turn the pages. In a few moments she found what she was looking for, a duplicate of the likeness which lay before them, with the exception, of course, of its frightful distortions.

"This picture was made by Gibson, on Fifth Avenue," she said, referring to the photograph in the book. Both Baker and Duvall saw at once that on the retouched picture the name of the photographer had been scratched off.

"How many of them were made, and what became of them?" Duvall asked quickly.

"Ordinarily I could not answer such a question," Mrs. Morton replied, "for Ruth has had many photographs taken, and we have not of course kept a record of them, or what has become of them, but in this particular case I happen to remember that she did not like the pose particularly, and ordered but half a dozen. I do not think that she gave any of them away. If I am right in my supposition, there should be five more here in the apartment." Closing the book, Mrs. Morton went to the cabinet again, and took out a portfolio containing numberless photographs of her daughter in all sorts of poses.

After some searching, she produced a brown paper envelope, containing a number of pictures, all taken by the same photographer, at the same time. There were in the envelope four copies of the photograph, the fifth of which was contained in the album.

"Evidently one has been given away," Duvall exclaimed. "Now if we can only

find out to whom, our search for the writer of these letters may be very quickly ended."

Mr. Baker regarded them both with a puzzled look.

"I have seen that picture before," he said, "and of course I could not have done so, had I not seen the one that is missing." He sat for a while in silence, searching his recollection for a solution of the problem. Suddenly he spoke. "There was a picture like that in my office, at one time," he exclaimed. "Miss Morton sent a number down, for advertising purposes, and I am positive that this one was among them. I remember distinctly the pose of the head, the unusual arrangement of the hair. That photograph should be in our files. The fact that it has been taken out shows that the person who has been writing these letters is a member of our own staff, or at least has access to our files."

"That does not necessarily follow," observed Duvall.

"Why not?"

"Because the picture might have been obtained from the photographer."

"But they are not allowed to dispose of the portraits of others, without the sitter's permission."

"I know that, but they sometimes do so, especially in the case of anyone so well known as Miss Morton. She has become a sort of public character."

"Well," remarked Duvall, "We can readily find out, in the morning. You, Mr. Baker, can go through your files, and should you find the photograph to be there, I will take the matter up with the photographer. If, on the contrary, the picture is missing, it will be fairly conclusive evidence that the person or persons we are looking for are in some way connected with the studio."

"I will make an investigation the first thing in the morning," Mr. Baker announced, rising. "Do you expect to be at the studio early, Mr. Duvall?"

"Yes. Quite early."

"Then we had best leave matters until then. Good night. Good night, Mrs.

Morton." He turned and started toward the door.

He had proceeded but a few steps, when the three occupants of the room were startled by a series of sudden and agonizing cries. From the rear of the apartment came a succession of screams so piercing in their intensity, so filled with horror, that they found themselves for a moment unable to stir. Then Mrs. Morton gave a cry of anguish, and darted out into the hall, closely followed by Duvall and Mr. Baker.

The screams continued, filling the entire apartment with their clamor. That the voice which uttered them was that of Ruth Morton, none of the three doubted for a moment. With sinking hearts they went on, prepared for the worst. Duvall found himself dreading the moment when they should reach the bedroom door, and face the girl, her beauty, perhaps, disfigured beyond all recognition.

There was a sharp turn, at the end of the hall, into a shorter cross hall, at the end of which was the door of Ruth's bedroom. It was closed, but as though in response to Mrs. Morton's agonized appeals, it suddenly opened as they reached it, and Ruth Morton, pale as death, appeared.

With wide open eyes staring straight ahead, she half stepped, half fell through the doorway, her slender figure clothed only in her night dress.

"Ruth," Mrs. Morton screamed, as she caught sight of her daughter.

The girl tried to say something, but her tongue failed her. Then, with a faint moan, she lurched forward and fell limply into her mother's arms.

CHAPTER VII.

A WARNING.

WHEN Duvall, Mr. Baker, of the motion picture company, and Mrs. Morton rushed down the hallway of the latter's apartment in response to the screams from Ruth's bedroom, they were one and all convinced

that the girl had suffered some terrible injury—that the mysterious threats to destroy her beauty which had been made during the past few days had been converted into some frightful reality.

One glance at the girl's white face as she fell fainting into her mother's arms told the detective that their fears had been, to that extent at least, groundless. The girl's lovely features although drawn and contorted by fear, showed no signs of the disfigurement they feared.

Leaving the girl to her mother's care, Duvall closely followed by Baker, dashed into the bedroom, and at once switched on the lights.

The place, to the intense surprise of both, presented a picture of perfect quiet and order. The bedclothing was slightly disarranged, but this of course was but natural, since Ruth had sprung up under the influence of some terrible fear, and rushed from the room. Everything else seemed in its place.

Duvall's first act was to examine the window. The one fronting on the fire escape was closed and tightly fastened. It was perfectly clear that no one had entered the room in that way.

The other window, facing on the court, was raised a few inches, just as Mrs. Morton had left it half an hour before. Duvall turned to his companion with a puzzled frown.

"I had supposed, Mr. Baker," he said, "that someone had entered this room, and frightened Miss Morton while she was asleep, but that is impossible. The windows have not been disturbed."

Baker glanced at the one which faced the court.

"That one may have been," he said, indicating it with a nod. "Someone may have come in that way, raising the window to effect an entrance, and lowering it again after leaving."

"I admit that what you say would be possible, were there any way in which the window might be reached from outside," Duvall replied, "but if you will look out, and tell me how anyone could make an

entrance from the court, I will agree to the possibility you suggest."

Baker raised the window, and glanced out.

"The apartment above," Duvall went on, "is unoccupied, and the window above is closed and fastened. The little attic in the adjoining house is unused, although that is not important, since no one could reach this window from it, in any event. Can you suggest any other way?"

Mr. Baker shook his head.

"She must have been frightened by some terrible nightmare," he said. "I do not wonder at it. She has gone through enough to upset anybody's nerves. Suppose we go back and question her."

"Just a moment," exclaimed Duvall. Then he dropped upon his knees beside the disordered bed, and began to examine the surface of the counterpane with minute care.

"What is it?" Baker asked, joining him.

"I don't know—yet," returned Duvall, as he took a magnifying glass from his pocket and proceeded to scrutinize with the greatest interest some marks upon the counterpane's surface. Presently he rose, replaced the glass in his pocket, and turned to his companion.

"There is something very astonishing about this whole affair," he exclaimed. "What do you make of those?" He indicated a series of dark smudges upon the bedspread, arranged in little groups.

Baker bent over and examined the marks with an exclamation of surprise.

"Why—they look like finger prints," he cried. "Large finger prints."

"It is impossible to say whether they are finger prints or not," Duvall replied. "As you see, there are a great many of them, very confusingly arranged. But there is something else, that you have not noticed. What do you suppose could have made a mark like this?" He pointed to a long straight dark line, which extended half way across the counterpane, and pointed directly toward the window which faced upon the court. The line was very

faint, but clearly defined, as though someone had laid a thin dusty stick across the bed.

"I can't make anything of it," Baker exclaimed, gazing toward the window.

"Nor can I," said Duvall. "At one time, because of certain indentations on the letters found in this room, I had thought that they might have been introduced through the partly opened window by means of a long rod, a fishing-pole, perhaps. This mark on the counterpane appears to bear out that theory. The smudges which look like finger-prints may have been merely the points at which the end of the pole, or whatever was attached to the end of the pole, came in contact with the bed. All that is perfectly supposable. But you can see for yourself that if a long pole were thrust through the window, raised as the latter was but a trifle above the level of the bed, the other end of such a pole must of necessity have been held at approximately the same level, and the only point outside the window from which it could have been so held is *in the air, forty feet above the bottom of the court!* The thing is absurd."

"There is, of course, the window of the apartment below," Baker suggested. "Might not it have been used?"

"I thought of that," Duvall replied. "You can see for yourself that even a tall man standing on the window sill below, would find not only his head, but even his hands far below the sill of this window. Nor could any one so support themselves, without something to hold on to. But all that is beside the question. The people in the apartment below are friends of Mrs. Morton's, a middle-aged man and his wife, with two young children. They are eminently respectable people, and quite above suspicion."

"Then I give the thing up," exclaimed Baker. "Suppose we have a talk with Miss Morton."

They found the girl lying on a couch in the library, with her mother sitting beside her. She seemed very weak and

quiet, but in full possession of her faculties. Duvall drew up a chair, and asked her if she felt able to tell them what had occurred.

"Yes," she replied in a faint voice, her face still showing evidences of her fright. "I will try to tell you exactly what happened.

"I had taken some medicine to make me sleep, before I got into bed, because I was very nervous and upset. When mother came back to fix the windows I was already drowsy, and just remember that she turned out the lights, and then I must have dozed.

"All of a sudden I heard a strange, rasping noise, and I woke up, with the feeling that there was some one in the room. I don't know just why I felt so sure of that, whether it was merely a sense of someone's presence, or the sound of some one moving about near my bed. I think, however, that it was the latter.

"The room was dark, of course, but enough light came through the windows to make a moving object distinguishable. I looked about, terribly frightened, but for a moment I saw nothing. The noise I had heard at first continued. Then, without the least warning, a hand seemed to clutch at the bedclothes, and I saw above me, bending over me, a terrible dark face, exactly like the grinning death's-head on those letters I've been getting.

"I lay perfectly still, frozen with horror, and in a moment the face had disappeared, and then I began to scream. Right after that I sprang from the bed and threw open the door, and found mother and Mr. Baker and yourself standing in the hall. That is all I know."

Duvall looked at her for a moment, puzzled.

"Are you sure you really saw some one leaning over you? Might it not have been an illusion, the result of your nervous condition?"

"No. I am certain some one was there —some one quite tall, I should say, and with a terrible, evil face."

"It might have been a mask, of course," Duvall suggested. "Some one wearing a mask."

"Yes. It might have been. It was too dark for me to tell, of course. But I remember the eyes, for I saw them distinctly. They were only a few inches from my own." She put her hands to her face and shuddered. "It was terrible, terrible. I shall never sleep in that room again."

"There—there, deary," Mrs. Morton whispered in a soothing voice. "You need not sleep there. You can lie right here, for the rest of the night, and I will stay with you and see that no one harms you."

"That would be best, Mrs. Morton," Duvall remarked. "And to-morrow I suggest that you and your daughter move, temporarily at least, to another location. Some quiet hotel, where you will not be subject to these terrible annoyances. I cannot imagine how it is done, but in some way, some almost superhuman way, it seems, some one can apparently either enter your daughter's room, or at least reach it from without, at will."

"What do you mean by that?" asked Ruth, somewhat mystified.

"I mean this, Miss Morton. I do not believe that there was any one in your room to-night. I do not believe that there has ever been any one there. But I do believe that the two letters we found there were introduced from without, in some mysterious way, at the end of a long pole, or rod. And I think that what frightened you so to-night was merely a mask, a grotesque representation of the seal used on the letters, and pushed toward you in some way, as you lay in bed for the purpose of terrifying you."

"But—why—why?" the girl cried.

"I cannot say. But it has occurred to me that these people, whoever they are, that are trying to injure you, may not intend any physical violence at all, at least for the present, but may be depending solely upon the terrible and insidious power of suggestion. You must

bear this possibility in mind, and try to control your fears. I can readily believe that thirty days of this sort of persecution, and you would be a physical and mental wreck. But we shall stop it. You need have no fear on that score."

Mrs. Morton turned to her daughter with a few words of explanation.

"Mr. Richards, or rather, Mr. Duvall, is not a newspaper man, Ruth, but a detective, who is trying to bring the wretches who are annoying you to justice. I feel every confidence in him."

Ruth turned toward Duvall a very white and pathetic face.

"I hope you will succeed, Mr. Duvall," she said, in a weak voice. "I cannot stand much more."

"I shall, Miss Morton. And now," he turned to Mr. Baker, "I think we had better go, and let Miss Morton get some rest. I will come here in the morning, Mrs. Morton," he continued, addressing the girl's mother, "and we will consider further the question of your moving to a hotel. Meanwhile I do not think you have anything further to fear this evening. Good night."

Before leaving the apartment he made another examination of the marks upon the bedclothes, then closed and fastened both windows, and locked the door of the room.

Mr. Baker left him at the corner.

"You will come to the studio to-morrow, of course."

"By all means. I shall come down with Miss Morton and her mother. That will give us an opportunity to investigate further the matter of the missing photograph, and also to talk over that plan I had in mind concerning the new film you are to show at the Grand to-morrow night. It is barely possible that, by means of a plan I have in mind, we may be able to locate the person or persons responsible for all this trouble."

"I certainly hope so," said Baker, as he took his leave. "This thing is getting on my nerves, too."

Duvall made his way back to his hotel,

as much mystified as ever. He had thought for a moment of spending the night on the sidewalk in front of the Morton's apartment, watching the windows facing on the court, but his experience told him that it would be useless. The alarm which Ruth had made, the closing of the windows of her bedroom, the locking of the door, all made it highly improbable that any further attempt would be made to annoy her during the night. He walked along in a state of intense preoccupation, trying to discover some reasonable explanation of the astonishing events of the day.

Once he had an impression, a feeling, that he was being followed, but when he turned around, there was no one in sight but a slightly tipsy man and a couple of young girls far down the street. He dismissed the thought from his mind, and proceeded to his hotel.

It was not yet eleven o'clock, and Grace was waiting for him in the little parlor of their suite.

"Well, Richard," she remarked, as he came in, "you've had quite a day of it."

"Yes, quite," he replied, throwing himself into a chair. "What have *you* been doing with yourself?"

"Shopping, mostly. I found it rather dull. I went to a moving picture this afternoon. Saw your friend Ruth Morton. She certainly is a very beautiful girl."

"Yes—very," Duvall replied, absently.

"Have you seen her to-day?" Grace went on, with a smile.

"Yes. Why?"

"Oh—nothing. I was just thinking."

Duvall burst into a laugh, and rising, went over to his wife and kissed her.

"For Heaven's sake, Grace," he said, "don't be silly. I'm not interested in motion-picture actresses."

"You weren't, I'll admit, nor in motion pictures either, until recently, but perhaps you have changed. I could understand any man being fascinated by a girl like Ruth Morton."

Duvall did not pursue the question. It

was a hard and fast rule between them not to discuss his professional work. And Mrs. Morton had made it a point that he should confide in no one, not even his wife.

"Well," he said, picking up an evening paper, "I'm not fascinated yet. No letters for me to-day, I suppose."

"None." Grace went on with her sewing.

They sat for a while in silence. Presently there came a knock on the door, and a boy appeared, bearing a telegram. Duvall opened it carelessly, thinking it some word from the overseer of his farm. He sat up with sudden astonishment as he read the contents of the message.

"Keep out," the telegram read, "or you will find that we can strike back."

Duvall placed the telegram in his pocket with a frown. So it appeared that in spite of all his care, his connection with the case was known. How this was possible he could not imagine. His first visit to the Morton apartment that day had been in the guise of a workman. His subsequent appearance at the studio, and later, at the apartment, had been in the character of a newspaper man. There was only one explanation. Some one had watched him while he was making his examination of Ruth Morton's room, and, subsequently, had followed him from the apartment to his hotel.

He began to realize that he was dealing with a shrewd brain, and one that acted with almost uncanny quickness and precision. He determined that, if Mrs. Morton and her daughter changed their place of residence the following day, he would do the same. He said nothing of his intentions to Grace, however. It was more than ever necessary that he preserve secrecy in this case.

"No bad news, I hope, Richard," Grace remarked, glancing up from her sewing.

"No. Nothing serious. Have you heard anything from home?"

"Yes. Everything is going along quite smoothly. The boy is well and happy,

and Mrs. Preston says to stay as long as we want to."

"Well," said Duvall, rising and throwing down his newspaper, "if things don't go better than they have been going today, I may have to be here some time. I've got a queer case on, Grace. I'd like to tell you about it, but I can't. But it is quite unusual. Some features to it that I have never met before."

"Oh—I wish I might help you," Grace exclaimed. "You know how often I have done so in the past."

"I know, dear. But I am bound to secrecy, for the present at least. Suppose we turn in now. I've got to get up early."

"All right," Grace said. "But if you need my help, don't hesitate to ask me. To tell you the truth, I'm having an awfully slow time."

CHAPTER VIII.

IN HIDING.

DUVALL made his appearance at the Morton apartment the following morning in his ordinary guise. It was his intention, when the time came, to disappear from the case in his normal person, to reappear in it, later, in a complete disguise. But that time, he felt, had not yet arrived.

Mrs. Morton received him in fairly good spirits. Her daughter, she said, had had a restful night, in spite of her terrible experience. When Ruth rose from the breakfast table to greet him, he was gratified to find that she showed no great traces of the fright of the evening before.

"I'm feeling almost myself again, Mr. Duvall," she said. "I've made up my mind not to let these people frighten me again."

"Nothing further occurred last night, of course," Duvall asked.

"Nothing," replied Mrs. Morton. "I could almost believe the whole thing a horrible dream."

They did not touch on the question of going to a hotel during the short interval

that elapsed before they set out for the studio. Duvall was anxious to see Mr. Baker. He hoped sincerely that by means of the photograph which had been in the company's files, some trace of the persons responsible for the threats might be obtained.

The trip to the studio was made most uneventfully, and Ruth started in with her work in very good spirits. Duvall, leaving the girl with her mother, sought out Mr. Baker in the latter's private office.

"Hello!" Baker cried, grasping the detective's hand warmly. "Anything new?"

"Not a thing. How about the photograph we were going to trace?"

Mr. Baker frowned.

"It's a curious thing," he replied. "Most curious. The picture in question was, I find, taken from the files by Mr. Moore, our president, and placed on his desk. He always admired it, and kept it there, along with a number of others, to show to persons calling upon him. Now, it seems, it has disappeared. There is not the slightest trace of it."

"But," Duvall objected, "who could have taken it?"

"A dozen people. Half a hundred, I guess. You see, Mr. Moore's office is a big room, just beyond here." He rose and led the detective through a short corridor. "Here it is," he went on, throwing open the door. "This is where Mr. Moore receives his callers. It is his reception room, and no private papers are kept here. Those are all in the smaller office adjoining. This room is open at any time. After Mr. Moore leaves in the evening, and he often leaves early, any one might come in here. And when the offices are closed at night, I suppose any employee of the company might look in, if he cared to do so, without any one objecting. You see, this is a sort of public room. The inner office is always kept locked, but there has never seemed to be any good reason for locking this one."

"Still, although you cannot tell who

has taken the picture, it seems clear enough that it must have been removed by some one employed in the studio."

"Even that is by no means certain. So many people come here every day. All sorts of visitors, writers, actors, and the like. After business hours I don't doubt any number of persons enter this room, to look at the pictures of our great successes that hang on its walls. And then there are the caretakers, the scrub-women, and their friends. I find that many of them bring in outsiders after working hours to look at the studio and the famous offices. Of course it should not be, and it will not be, in the future, but up to now we have rather welcomed people from outside. It seemed good advertising."

Duvall followed his companion back to his office.

"Then this clue, like all the others in this singular case," he remarked, "seems to end in a blind alley."

"It seems so," assented Mr. Baker gloomily. "What was your plan about the new film we're going to show to-night?"

Duvall was about to speak, but before he could do so they heard a slight commotion in the hall outside. Then some one rapped violently on the door.

Both he and Baker sprang to their feet.

"Come in!" the latter cried.

The door was flung open, and Mr. Edwards, the director, who was making the picture upon which Ruth Morton was working, strode hastily into the room.

"Mr. Baker!" he exclaimed, then paused upon seeing Duvall.

"What is it?" Baker replied.

"Will you look here a minute, please?"

Baker went up to him, his face showing the greatest uneasiness.

"What's the matter?" he asked.
"Anything wrong?"

"Yes. Miss Morton was going through the scene in the first part, where she gets the telegram, you know, and when she opened the message and read it, she fainted."

"Fainted? What was in the telegram to make her faint?"

"Well, it ought to have read, 'Will call for you to-night with marriage license—Jimmy.' That was the 'prop' message we had prepared. But somebody must have substituted another one for it. This is what she read." He handed Baker a yellow slip of paper. "I can't make anything out of it."

Baker snatched the telegram from his hand with a growl of rage and read it hastily. Then he passed it to Duvall.

"What do you think of that?" he asked.

Duvall gazed at the telegram with a feeling of helpless anger.

It read:

Twenty-six days more. When you appear in your new picture at the Grand to-night, it will be your last. I shall be there.

The grinning death's head seal was appended in lieu of a signature, as before.

A feeling of resentment swept over the detective. It seemed that these people acted as they saw fit, with supreme indifference to the fact that he was on their trail. Never before had he felt his skill so flouted, his ability made so light of. And yet, as usual, the message had apparently been delivered in such a way as to make tracing it impossible.

"Still at it, it seems," Mr. Baker remarked. "This thing has got to stop, and at once. I don't propose to let anybody make a monkey of me."

Duvall turned to the director, Mr. Edwards.

"Who prepared the original telegram?" he asked quickly.

Mr. Edwards looked at the detective in surprise, evidently wondering what this stranger had to do with the matter.

"Answer, Edwards. It's all right," snapped Mr. Baker.

"I prepared the property telegram," the director answered.

"When?"

"Last night. I knew it would be needed to-day."

"What did you do with it?"

"I left it on my desk. This morning I took it into the studio, and when the moment arrived I gave it to the actor, who took it to Miss Morton."

"Was he out of your sight after you gave him the telegram?"

"No. He walked right on the scene."

"Then he couldn't have substituted another for it?"

"No. It would have been impossible, unless he used sleight of hand."

"Before you gave the man the telegram, where was it?"

"In my coat pocket."

"No chance, I suppose, of any one having taken it out and substituted another?"

"None."

"Then it is clear that the substitution must have been effected between the time you left your office last night and your arrival here this morning?"

"Yes."

"Was this possible?"

"Undoubtedly. I left my office last night about six. It is never locked. The caretakers, the women who clean the offices, were in there later, and from seven to nine this morning it would also have been a simple matter for any one to enter and make the change."

Duvall turned to Mr. Baker.

"It's the same story," he said. "Some one who works in the building is responsible for this thing, or else is able to bribe one or more of your employees to act for them. But we won't get very far looking for the guilty person, with several hundred people to watch and no clues whatever to go on. Suppose we go back to your office, and I will tell you what I had in mind about this evening."

"Is Miss Morton able to go on with the scene?" Baker asked, as Edwards started away.

"No. She seems all broken up. I don't think she is very well. Her mother is going to take her home as soon as she feels better."

"Will you ask Mrs. Morton to wait a little while, Mr. Edwards? Tell her that Mr. Duvall will join her presently, and go back to the city with her."

Mr. Edwards nodded and withdrew, and Duvall and Mr. Baker retired to the latter's private office.

"What did you have in mind about that new film we're going to release to-night?" Mr. Baker asked.

"I'll explain that presently. First, tell me how long it will take you to make a short section of film—say enough to show for about ten seconds?"

"Oh—not long. But what of?"

"I'll explain that presently. But you could make such a section of film, develop and print it, and insert it in the picture you are going to show to-night, if you had to, couldn't you?"

"Yes—if we had to. But what's the idea?"

Duvall took a bit of paper from his pocket and handed it to Baker.

"I want you to make a picture of this, and have it inserted in the film at any convenient point—say, at the beginning of the second part. And you had better have the cutting and pasting-in done by some trusted person, under your personal supervision."

"But," said Baker, gazing in amazement at the bit of paper Duvall had handed him, "what's the idea of putting this in our picture? It wouldn't do at all."

"Look at that telegram Mr. Edwards just gave you. The writer says in it, 'I shall be there.' Now, if the person who is causing all this trouble is going to be in the audience at the Grand Theater to-night, it is our business to find her. I say her, because I am convinced the guilty person is a woman."

A look of comprehension began to dawn upon Mr. Baker's face.

"By George!" he exclaimed. "You figure out that this will cause her to disclose herself—make some sign?"

"I feel certain of it."

"Then we will put it in." He laid the

square of paper on his desk. "I will have the section of film made privately and at once. I shall not tell even the other officers of the company about it. I suppose they will give me the devil until after they know the reasons for it, but then, of course, it will be all right."

Duvall rose and put out his hand.

"You will be there to-night, of course?"

"Of course. And you?"

"Oh, I'll be on hand all right, although you may not recognize me. Good day." With a quick hand-shake he left the room and went to look for Ruth and her mother.

He found them in the girl's dressing-room, ready to depart. Ruth was pale and terrified, showing the most intense nervousness in every word and movement. Mrs. Morton, scarcely less affected, strove with all her power to remain calm, in order that her daughter might not break down completely. Duvall did his best to cheer them up.

"You must not let this thing prey on your mind, Miss Morton," he said. "We are going to put a stop to it, and that very soon."

"I hope so, Mr. Duvall," the girl replied. "If you don't, I'm afraid I shall break down completely."

"I think we had better go home at once," Mrs. Morton said. "Ruth is in no condition to do any more work to-day."

"I quite agree with you about going, Mrs. Morton, but not home." He lowered his voice, as though fearing that even at that moment some tool of the woman who was sending the letters might be within ear-shot. "I suggest that you let me take your daughter to some quiet hotel. You can follow, with her maid and the necessary baggage, later on. But we must be certain to make the change in such a way that our enemies, who are undoubtedly watching us, will not know of it."

"We will all leave here in your car, giving out that we are going to your

home. No one will suspect anything to the contrary. On our arrival in the city, your daughter and I will leave the car and drive to the hotel in a taxicab. When, later on, you follow with the baggage, take a taxi, sending your own car to the garage. I know your confidence in your chauffeur, but in this affair we can afford to trust no one. Your daughter and yourself can remain quietly in the hotel, under an assumed name, for a few days, until she recovers her strength. Meanwhile, I have every expectation that the persons at the bottom of this shameful affair will have been caught."

The plan appealed to Mrs. Morton at once, and she told the detective so.

"But where shall we go to—what hotel?" she asked.

Duvall leaned over and whispered in her ear the name of an exclusive and very quiet hotel in the upper part of the city.

"Do not mention the name to any one," he said, "not even to the taxicab driver, when you leave the house. Tell him to put you down at the corner, a block away, and do not proceed to the hotel until you see that he has driven off. And keep your eyes on your maid. I do not suspect her, I admit, but there seems to be a leak somewhere, and we must stop it."

Mrs. Morton nodded and rose.

"We had better start, then," she said. "I understand perfectly. Have Ruth register in the name of Bradley. And I think, Mr. Duvall, if you can do so, you had better arrange to stop there as well."

"I had intended to do so," the detective replied.

"That will be better." Mrs. Morton led the way to the street.

"You did not intend to go to the showing of your new film at the Grand to-night, did you?" Duvall asked Ruth, after they had started away from the studio.

"Yes, I had intended to go," she replied. "I always go to my first releases. But to-night I do not feel able to do so."

"I think it is just as well. What you need most now is rest."

The girl looked at herself in a small mirror affixed to the side of the car.

"Oh," she exclaimed, "I look terribly! These people are right, it seems. Three more weeks of this persecution and my looks would be quite gone. Mr. Edwards told me only this morning that he had never seen me look so badly." There were tears in her eyes.

Duvall realized that she spoke the truth. The effect of the strain upon her nervous system, the brutal shocks of the past two days, the horror of the experience of the night before, had wrought havoc with the girl's beauty. Her face, gray, lined, haggard, her eyes heavy and drawn, made her the very opposite of the radiant creature that had created such a furore in motion-picture circles.

The methods of her persecutors, if unchecked, would beyond any doubt wreck her strength and health in a short time; and, in addition, there was the danger that at any moment a physical attack, a swiftly thrown acid bomb, an explosive mixture concealed in an innocent-looking package, might destroy both her beauty and her reason in one blinding flash. With the fear in her great brown eyes constantly before him, Duvall determined more than ever to free her from this terrible persecution.

They separated in the neighborhood of Thirtieth Street, Duvall and Miss Morton taking a taxicab that stood before one of the smaller Fifth Avenue hotels. He made a pretense of entering the hotel, and did not summon the taxi until Mrs. Morton's car was well out of sight up the avenue. Then he instructed the driver to proceed first to his hotel.

Their stop here was but momentary. Duvall went to his room, threw a few articles of clothing into his grip, left a note for Grace, telling her that he would be absent for several days, then rejoined his companion and drove up-town to the hotel opposite the park, the name of which he had mentioned to Mrs. Morton,

He felt perfectly certain that they had not been followed.

Upon arriving at the hotel, he entered their names, including that of Mrs. Morton, upon the register, using the pseudonym which that latter had suggested. Then, sending Ruth to her room, he asked to see the manager, and had a brief conference with him in private. Immediately thereafter he went up to his own apartment, which adjoined the suite selected for the Mortons. He tapped lightly on the communicating door.

"Are you all right, Miss Morton?" he called.

"Yes," came the girl's voice from the opposite side. "All right, thank you."

CHAPTER IX.

GRACE GETS A CLUE.

GRACE DUVALL said goodby to her husband that morning with very little enthusiasm. She was not jealous of him, she was too sensible a woman, and trusted him too fully for that. But his sudden interest in Ruth Morton, the charming motion picture star, seemed rather incomprehensible to her. Of course she suspected he was working on a case which concerned the girl although Duvall had neither affirmed nor denied it. But she felt lonely, and perhaps a trifle out of sorts, and found her solitary breakfasts, luncheons, dinners, a little trying. So often before, she and Richard had worked together. Why, she wondered, did he so pointedly exclude her from this case? She would have liked to talk it over with him.

She sat rather disconsolately in her room most of the forenoon, and about one o'clock made ready for a lonely luncheon. She was just about to leave the apartment when the telephone bell rang. Grace hastened to it at once, hoping that the call might be from her husband.

A woman's voice, low, firm, determined sounded in her ears.

"I want to speak with Mr. Duvall," the voice said.

"Mr. Duvall is out. This is Mrs. Duvall."

"Very well, Mrs. Duvall. If you want to keep your husband from very serious harm, you had better tell him to steer clear of Ruth Morton's affairs in future. A word to the wise, you know. Good day." The speaker suddenly rang off.

Grace turned from the telephone, her brain in a whirl. What danger threatened her husband? Ought she not to tell him of the message as soon as possible, so that he might be on his guard? And what did this mysterious reference to "Ruth Morton's affairs" mean. Did it imply that Richard was in any way involved—but that was preposterous. She put the thought from her mind, and went down in the elevator to a lonely and not very enjoyable meal.

As she left the dining room, and passed through the lobby, she thought she saw ahead of her a familiar figure. A moment later she realized that it was Richard himself, walking very rapidly toward the main entrance, his satchel in his hand. Was he leaving the hotel? And if so, ought she not to make an attempt to give him the message she had just received, before he did so? She walked quickly after him, but his pace was so rapid that she reached the sidewalk only in time to see him swing himself into a waiting taxi, baggage in hand, and drive quickly off.

What Grace saw, in addition to this, filled her with queer misgivings. Beside her husband in the cab was a woman—a very beautiful woman, whom Grace had no difficulty whatever in identifying as Ruth Morton. And she also noticed, in the brief moment that elapsed before the taxi shot toward the avenue, that the woman seemed to be in tears, and that Richard leaned over with the utmost solicitude and affection and clasped her hand in his. For the first time in her life, Grace Duvall was actually jealous.

Thoughts of possible danger to her husband, however, were paramount in her mind. Without an instant's hesitation she stepped into a second taxi, whose driver

was trying to attract her attention, and told him to follow the car containing the man and woman which had just driven off.

The chauffeur grinned knowingly, nodded, and started his car. His grin drove from Grace's mind her sudden and unaccustomed jealousy. She knew that Richard must be going away with this girl for some reason connected with his professional work. Of course that work did not usually include consoling beautiful damsels in distress, but there must be extenuating circumstances. She put her unpleasant thoughts from her mind, and proceeded on her mission, to give her husband the warning message she had just received, with a reasonably calm mind.

After a drive of some fifteen minutes, she saw the cab ahead of them begin to slow up, and observed that her chauffeur did likewise. Presently the first cab stopped before the doors of a big, imposing looking hotel, and Richard and Miss Morton hurriedly entered.

Grace did not at once get out. She knew that her husband might resent her having followed him, and did not care to put him to any disadvantage by appearing so unexpectedly upon the scene. She waited, therefore, for several minutes, until he would have had time to go to his room, and then, paying off her cabman, she strolled quietly into the hotel lobby.

There were a few persons sitting about, but Richard was not among them. Going to the clerk at the desk, she asked to see Mr. Richard Duvall.

The clerk regarded her with a supercilious stare, consulted his records in a bored way, then informed her that no such person was registered there.

Grace was completely taken aback.

"But I saw him come in, only a few moments ago," she protested.

"No such person here, miss." With a frigid smile the clerk turned away, watching her, however, out of the corner of his eye, as though he considered her a suspicious character.

Grace leaned over and examined the register. There were three entries upon it,

in a handwriting clearly that of her husband. "Mrs. Bradley and maid" the first entry said. "Miss Bradley," the second. They had been assigned a suite of rooms. The third and last entry was "John Bradley." His room adjoined the suite. All three were set down as hailing from Boston.

Grace puzzled for a long time over this mysterious series of entries without arriving at any definite conclusion regarding them. Where was the so-called Mrs. Bradley? And why had her husband assumed the same name. Was he posing as Ruth Morton's brother, and if so, for what reason? She could not make head or tail of the matter, and wondered whether she had better send up her card, or write Richard a note and leave it for him, telling of the warning. While she was debating the matter in her mind, she suddenly saw him emerge from one of the elevators at the opposite side of the lobby, and come toward the desk.

Grace approached him at once, glad that the matter had been so simply arranged.

"Richard," she said, in a low voice. "I want to speak to you."

The gentleman she had addressed regarded her with a frown.

"My name is not Richard, madam," he said, pointedly. "I am John Bradley. You must have made a mistake." With a polite bow he passed on.

Grace was completely taken aback. She knew that between them there existed a tacit understanding never to address each other, in public, during the progress of a case, unless requested to do so by some sign. But she felt that she had important information to give her husband, and then, she *had* been a trifle jealous and annoyed. The thought that she had committed an error filled her with chagrin. Without a word, she left the hotel.

At a nearby corner she stepped into a telephone booth, and calling up the hotel, asked to speak to Mr. John Bradley. In a few moments she heard Richard's familiar tones.

"This is Grace," she said quickly. "I'm sorry I spoke to you, just now, but I wanted to tell you that some woman telephoned the hotel to-day, and left a warning to the effect that if you did not keep out of Miss Morton's affairs, you would be in serious danger."

"How did you know where I was?" Duvall asked.

"I saw you leave the hotel, and followed you."

"You should not have done so."

"But I wanted to give you the message. I thought you ought to know."

"I understand that, but I wished my presence here to be unknown to anyone. You made a serious mistake. I only hope that no harm will come of it."

"But—how could harm come of it?"

"You drove here in one of the hotel's regular cabs, I suppose?"

"Yes."

"Then the people I am trying to avoid may trace me here, through the driver."

"Oh—Richard—I'm so sorry. Isn't there anything I can do?"

"Nothing, now, except to make no further attempt to communicate with me here. Good-by."

Grace returned to her hotel, very thoroughly dissatisfied with what she had done. It seemed to her that by trying to warn Richard of possible danger, she might only have brought it upon him. Apparently he had left their hotel, to avoid the very persons who had telephoned the warning message to her. She looked about, hoping that the cabman who had driven her uptown might now be at his usual stand. To her delight, she saw that he was.

She went up to the man, a slim, keen looking young Irishman, and asked him:

"Do you remember driving me up-town an hour or so ago?"

"Sure I do, miss," answered the man, touching his cap.

"Then please forget completely where you went, will you?" She handed the man a ten-dollar bill. "It is barely possible that someone may try to find out,

through you, where I went. Be sure that you give them no information."

"They'll get nothing out of me, miss," the man replied, pocketing the bill with a pleased grin.

"And if anybody *does* try to find out, get their name, if you can, and if not, a description of them."

"I'll do my best, miss."

"I am stopping here. My name is Duvall, Mrs. Duvall."

"Very good, ma'am. I'll attend to it, ma'am."

Grace went up to her room, satisfied that she had remedied her mistake, and began to look through an afternoon paper she had bought. Glancing down the list of attractions, she suddenly saw the name of Ruth Morton, in large letters, billed in a new feature play, "An American Beauty," opening at the Grand Theater that night. She at once made up her mind to go. Since yesterday, her interest in Miss Morton had perceptibly increased.

She was just finishing her dinner, when a page came through the room, calling her name. She got up at once and followed him to the lobby.

"I am Mrs. Duvall," she said.

"There's a chauffeur outside wants to see you, ma'am," he said, "Tom Leary."

Grace understood at once, and made her way to the sidewalk. The cab driver of the morning stood near the entrance.

"I beg pardon, ma'am, for calling you out," he said, "but I couldn't come in, and there was something I felt you ought to know."

"What is it?"

"A lady came here to see me a while ago," he said. "A smallish looking woman, not pretty, with light hair. She had on a dark brown suit. Not very good style, ma'am. She asked me if I knew anybody in the hotel named Duvall. I said I did. I find she'd been asking all the other cabmen, and had been to the desk, before that. I guess she must have been inquiring for your husband, ma'am."

"Yes—yes—very likely," Grace hastily replied. "What then?"

"Well, ma'am, she then asked me if I knew Mrs. Duvall. I said I did. Then she wanted to know if I'd driven either you or your husband to any other hotel to-day, and I said I hadn't, but that I usually did drive you, when you went anywhere. I took the liberty of saying that, ma'am."

"Yes. I'm glad you did. Go on."

"Then she hands me five dollars, and says that if I *did* drive you to any other hotel, I was to let her know."

"Where?" Grace asked, eagerly.

The man fished from his pocket a small bit of cardboard upon which was penciled "Alice Watson, General Delivery."

Grace stared at the bit of paper in surprise. Had she, by some lucky chance, discovered the very person for whom Richard was seeking? Of course the name was probably a fictitious one, and the address "General Delivery," meant nothing, and yet it provided a clue by means of which this woman might be found.

"You have acted very wisely, Leary," she said. "I am greatly obliged to you."

"Do you want me to send her any word, ma'am?"

"I may. I am anxious to get hold of this woman, or, to be more exact, my husband is. I will consult with him first, however. It may be that he will want you to write her a letter, giving her some such information as she desires, and then, by going to the general delivery window at the post-office and watching, identify her when she comes for it. Do you think you could arrange to get off and do this?"

"Well, ma'am, even if I can't arrange to get off, you could of course hire my cab, and—"

"Of course," Grace interrupted. "Very well. I will let you know further about the matter a little later. Meanwhile here is something more for your trouble." She gave the man another bill. "Now drive me to the Grand Theater."

Bricks and Beans.



by Johnston
McCulley

PETER SMITH worked eight hours a day, six days a week, for twenty-five cents an hour, and on the wages thus acquired he maintained himself, Mrs. Peter Smith, and three little Smiths, two of whom were old enough already to kick out shoes and wear out stockings and go to school. He lived with his brood in a two-room shack that fronted on an alley behind a factory, and, from the front door one had a wide view of old tin cans and broken bottles.

He was vitally interested in bricks and beans.

John Henry Benburker worked an average of two hours a day, six days a week —except when there was a board meeting and his hours of toil were lengthened—and enjoyed an income of about half a million a year for the two hours a day. For the extra labor of board meetings he was paid overtime with nice, new gold pieces. On this income he maintained himself, paid alimony to a lady sojourning in Italy, and kept the wolf from the door of his son, Lawrence Benburker, a

fastidious young gentleman who could tell the vintage every time after the first sip, granted that it was early enough in the day. John Henry Benburker lived in a marble mansion fronting on a broad boulevard, and a special watchman kept undesirables away.

And John Henry Benburker was vitally interested in bricks and beans.

It stands to reason that two gentlemen such as Peter Smith and John Henry Benburker, as far apart as the poles socially and financially yet having a certain interest in common, should develop a situation. They did not disappoint.

On this certain Saturday it was an hour after nightfall and a fine drizzle was falling as Peter Smith, his arms carrying a burden of bundles, hurried down the alley toward his home, stumbling over bottles as he walked, and often kicking tin cans out of his path.

Twenty yards from the shack there descended upon him from out the darkness a boy of eight and a girl of six—his son

and daughter. They always met him in this manner when he returned from work, and they always knew when he was approaching, for Peter Smith was a man who whistled when the day's labor was done.

Since his arms were full of bundles and he could not pick them up—an occurrence of each and every Saturday night—they contented themselves by clinging to the tail of his coat and shrieking their glee. This daily home-coming of their male parent was an event with young Peter Smith and little Miss Mary Smith.

They never saw him in the morning, for Peter Smith was up and away before they were awake, having made it a practice to walk the five miles to the brick-yard where he worked and thus save thirty cents a week carfare.

It would have been more pleasant, of course, to have lived nearer the scene of his daily toil, but months of thought and mathematical computations had convinced Peter Smith that the difference in rent, added to the cost of moving, would outweigh the saving of car-fares and the cost of shoe leather expended. It was his joyous belief, born of necessity, that a walk of five miles every morning before beginning a day's hard work kept a man in excellent physical condition.

John Henry Benburker always was speaking of wishing to remedy his physical condition, but he never attempted following the prescription of Peter Smith. Benburker pranced around the golf links three afternoons weekly—sane on those days when he felt fatigued and stopped at the ninth hole to send his caddie back for his car.

"Tanny?" demanded little Miss Mary Smith this Saturday evening, as she tugged at her father's coat-tail.

"You bet!" Peter Smith replied heartily.

"Red tanny?" she persisted.

"Red tanny and yellow tanny," Peter replied.

"Two sticks?" demanded his son and heir.

"You bet! Two big sticks of tanny, but you must let baby sister say whether she wants the red one or yellow one."

"Red!" the baby announced.

"Good enough! You'll have to wait until we get into the house."

"Got meat?" the boy demanded.

"You bet we have, son—meat for Sunday. And an egg a piece for breakfast—what do you think of that? An egg for mama and an egg for sister, and an egg for you and an egg for me. I bought four—what do you think of that?"

"Baby," suggested his young daughter.

"Babies don't eat eggs," said Peter Smith, and under his breath he added: "Thank Heaven!"

"Go ocean?" his son demanded.

Peter Smith did not answer, for two reasons; one of which was that they had reached the front door of the shack, and the other of which was that a man always likes to defer the telling of bad news. Mrs. Peter met them at the door, her face the abiding-place of smiles, for Mrs. Peter loved her husband and clung to him—something John Henry Benburker's spouse had not done.

Mrs. Peter relieved him of his bundles, putting them on a shelf in one corner of the kitchen; and while Peter removed the grime of labor from face and hands, she busied herself with the preparation of the evening meal. The baby cooed from a cot in a corner; the other two children pranced around the table and watched the food being put in place.

Ten minutes later the Smith family was busy eating. It was not to be expected, of course, that they would fare sumptuously on Saturday night. It was thoroughly understood that Saturday night's meal was composed of scraps and leavings of the week, and that was absolutely all right, since the day following always was a feast day when there was meat. Leavings and scraps can be made into a delicious thick soup when there is an economical Mrs. Peter Smith to preside over the stove.

Supper being over, Peter Smith filled

and lighted his pipe and puffed in contentment while Mrs. Peter did the dishes. The aroma that drifted from Peter's pipe might not have pleased an expert tobacco-tester, but the stuff with which the pipe was filled made smoke, and the bag it had come in bore a tobacco revenue stamp, so it must have been all right.

The baby was asleep now, and young Peter and young Mary were silent in the enjoyment of an inch of stick candy each. The grocer at the corner always gave Peter Smith two sticks of candy on Saturday night when Peter purchased the week's supplies, for Peter always paid cash. An inch of a stick on Saturday night, another inch after breakfast Sunday day, and the remainder on Sunday afternoon—that was the program.

The dishes having been washed and put away, Mrs. Peter went into the front room and sat down across the table from her husband.

"Any news?" she asked.

She smiled when she voiced the question, but a close observer would have noticed that the smile was wistful.

"No news," Peter replied.

This was a part of the regular program, too. No news meant that Peter still retained his job, since there had been no cut-down on men at the brick-yard; news would have meant disaster.

"How is everything at the grocery?" Mrs. Peter asked.

Peter puffed slowly at his pipe before he replied.

"Beans," he said, finally, "are doing the skyrocket act. Beans now are thirteen cents a pound. And I can remember when my old mother used to buy them for six pounds for a quarter, and better beans at that. Meat or beans—we've got to have one or the other. I got some meat for to-morrow—you saw what it was. Pretty poor stuff and not much juice in it, but maybe you can stew something along with it and make it do. If beans only would get cheaper—"

"Well, why don't they?" Mrs. Peter asked.

"I don't know. Maybe they're scarce—crop failed or something like that. Or else the trust is handling 'em. You never can tell. Tain't the grocer's fault—he has to stand a raise in price the same as we do—don't make as much profit as he used to, he says—and I believe him."

"It's pretty hard to get along," Mrs. Peter observed.

"Well, we're better off than a lot of others at that. I'm strong and can work, and the kids ain't sick, and you're all right. We got a place to live, and the kids go to school, and we eat. Of course, we could do with a lot more—but we're getting along all right."

"Things have got to get better for you some time," Mrs. Peter said.

"Sure they will!"

"I don't suppose—that is—" Mrs. Peter stammered and stopped. The children ceased eating candy and looked up in expectation. Peter Smith put his cold pipe down on the table and lowered his eyes and played with his belt.

"I'm—afraid not—not to-morrow," he said.

Mrs. Peter sighed.

"It's too bad!" she said. "But that'll come later, I suppose."

"Sure! The summer's young yet!" said Peter.

His son plucked him by the sleeve.

"No go ocean?" he asked.

"Not to-morrow, sonny. Now don't cry about it! We'll get there some Sunday this summer, and then, sonny, we'll all have a great time. Mama will have a lunch put up, and we can all wade, and maybe I'll buy you some peanuts and some stick candy—brown and white and yellow and red stick candy. But not to-morrow, sonny. Papa hasn't got the money to spare to-morrow."

His son turned away and remained silent for some five minutes; his young daughter, not exactly understanding, but feeling sure there was some disappointment afoot, whimpered that she was sleepy. Mrs. Peter put the children to bed and then returned to her husband.

"I do so hope we can—some Sunday this summer," she said.

"We'll do it, maw—don't worry!"

"It'd do the children so much good—just one day at the seaside. But it costs—"

They knew what it cost. There was a dollar for fares in the first place, and certainly at least twenty cents for amusement. The summer before they had taken their son to the beach for a day—their daughter at that time had been too weak to go because of a slight illness. And their son never had forgotten it, and he wanted to go again.

And this summer they could take the daughter, too, and the baby. They felt sure that a day at the beach would do the baby a world of good.

You see, there are ways and ways for a family to spend a day at the beach. A family may go in a motor-car and sit on the veranda of a fashionable hotel, and eat an expensive dinner, and return home in the cool of a moonlight night in the motor-car. Or a family may go in a crowded train and spend the day sitting near the edge of the water in the hot sun, wading a bit now and then, eating a luncheon carried from home that is attacked by ants and sand fleas as soon as it is opened, and returning tired but happy in another jammed train.

The Smiths had gone the latter way, making the outward trip on the very first train and returning by the very last. Their son had slept all the way in. But they had remembered that day's trip with keen enjoyment.

Why, think of it! Just to have a sight of the ocean, and see the waves roll in, and watch the breakers dash, and glimpse well-dressed gods and goddesses spending money and riding in automobiles, and read the flaring banners before sideshows and guess as to what one would see if one were rich and could enter!

That was a day. But it cost a dollar and twenty cents at least!

"The children have set their little

hearts on it," said Mrs. Peter. "And it would do them so much good! We surely must manage to do it, Peter! A dollar seems such a little bit of money, and yet—"

"Now, don't get pessimistic, maw. A dollar's a dollar! We'll manage it, all right. Maybe I can get an evening's extra work somewhere—or they might raise our wages. If only beans wasn't so blamed high—"

II.

It was two o'clock in the afternoon of Monday, and John Henry Benburker, just returned from luncheon, was wondering whether to drive out to the country club, when his son and heir was ushered in.

"Lo, dad!" said the son and heir.

"Hello, Lawrence! What's on your mind—more money? Got a new chorus girl, or is it a race-track tip?"

"Well, it's a shocker, dad!" The son and heir sat down beside his father, tosset his hat on a table near by, and deftly extracted a monogrammed cigarette from a gold case embellished with diamonds. "It's a thriller—a regular stem-winder of a jolt!"

"Not married, are you?" inquired John Henry in some alarm. He had a momentary vision of having to buy off some adventuress. He wouldn't mind the purchase price in that event, but he was afraid of notoriety.

He wasn't the stage-and-novel variety of rich parent. He never admonished his son for being a spendthrift. He had made up his mind years ago to give the boy everything that he wanted, since the boy was the only relative he had in the world. He had formed a trust fund already for the boy, and if the boy killed himself by high living before his father died the fund would go to a university.

That boy of John Henry Benburker's could do as he pleased and have as much money as he liked to do it with!

"No, I am not married," the son and

heir replied, grinning, "but I am going to be—I think."

"Not getting soft on one of those chorus girls, are you?"

"You're way off, dad. I'm thinking of a decent girl."

"Um! Been attending a religious revival, or something like that? This sure is a jolt!"

"That's only jolt the first, dad. Here's jolt the second—you know the girl and approve of her, and she's said she likes me better than any of the crowd, and I've cut out half a dozen chorus girls for her, and we're ready to tie up in about four or five months, as soon as she can have her dressmakers rush her some clothes."

"Four or five mo—*Rush* her clothes, you said? She sure must be crazy to marry you! What is all this—a joke? What's the name of the young lady?"

"Irene."

"Not—not Irene Grailey?"

"Correct, dad."

"My boy! My boy! The daughter of my old friend? The greatest little girl in town? Why, if you two marry you'll combine the two biggest fortunes in this end of the country! Great! Hah—I guess there is real stuff in the Benburkers. They've been trying to tell me you're going to Hades with your wine and your chorus girls, and that you'd not be able to pull up when you'd scattered your wild oats. How I'll gloat at 'em over this! Pulled up and reformed and going to marry the greatest little girl in town! This sure *is* a shocker! Shake hands, my son! I'll give a million to your first baby!"

"I'd rather have something right now, dad."

"Well, what is it? I'm in the mood to hand you almost anything this afternoon."

"It isn't just a roll of bills, dad. I—I want to buy something, and if I do I'll have to pay cash down—and it is some little sum. I never asked you for so much all in one lump."

"What do you want to buy?"

"A yacht—a little cruiser, dad. Benjie Sternier has one, and he's got to let go of it. Only had it in commission a couple of months—good as new. Got caught in the market and has to sell."

"I know something about that getting caught in the market," observed Benburker, chuckling.

"He paid" seventy-five thousand for her, dad. I can get her for fifty thousand cash down. Deal must be closed by noon to-morrow. I'll fit her up a little better and name her the Irene. See? Wouldn't that be great? I could take Irene and her mother and a couple of chaperons and some of the other fellows and girls on a cruise before the wedding—and we could take our honeymoon in her, too. But it's fifty thousand cash down, dad. I don't believe I ever asked you for that much in one lump before."

"I believe not. And you never had such a good excuse for asking it, son. Well—you can have your yacht. Tell Bennie to drift in here to-morrow morning at eleven and we'll close the deal."

"Thanks, dad. Even if you have got a few millions, that's quite a bit to ask you to pay right off like that."

"Oh, I'm not going to pay for it!"

"Wh-what?" the son and heir gasped.

"Give me your close attention, son, and I'll teach you a lesson in finance. You want a yacht and it costs fifty thousand dollars. You get the yacht, and it doesn't cost the Benburker family a cent."

"But—"

"Just a little lesson, son. Where does your fond father get his money?"

"Stocks, bonds—"

"In the first place, son, I mean. Where do I get the money with which I purchase stocks and bonds? Where is the foundation? No wise man puts a foundation on stocks and bonds. The foundation of a fortune can be built safely of one class of things—commodities used by the great mass of people every day. Now—where do I get my money?"

"Bricks and beans!"

"Correct, son—go to the head of the class. I get my money from bricks and beans. My companies control the bean market, and my companies control the brick market in this neck of the woods. They have to come to us when they build buildings or fill their stomachs. You want fifty thousand dollars, eh? One moment."

Still chuckling, John Henry Benburker turned to his desk and figured for a moment with a gold pencil on an ivory tablet.

"Here we are, son," he said. "I have five thousand men working in my brick-yards. For ten weeks I'll cut every man's wages one cent an hour, or eight cents a day—that's all. That's only forty-eight cents a week each. They'll never miss it—and the report will be spread that the retrenchment is for only a few weeks because of a poor market—rather keep all the men at a few cents less than fire a third of them and let the others have their regular wage. See? Very simple. That'll be four dollars and eighty cents per man for the ten weeks. Five thousand men—that'll be twenty-four thousand dollars even. There's half your yacht."

"Great guns!" the son and heir exclaimed.

"Simple little lesson. What's forty-eight cents a week? Nothing! They'll never miss it. Now for the rest of your yacht. I'll just pass the word that beans are to be raised one cent a pound until three million pounds have been sold. What's a cent a pound? Nothing! When that amount has been sold, we'll cut back to the old price—maybe. We'll explain that there's a shortage this year. Nothing easier! Three million pounds at a cent a pound—thirty thousand dollars.

"Add that to the twenty-four thousand from the brick yards. There you have fifty-four thousand dollars, my beloved son—your yacht and four thousand over for any little improvements on her you may desire to make. There you are! We buy the yacht, but we don't have to

dig in our own bank-roll to pay for her. And the joke is that nobody is hurt. What's forty-eight cents a week to a man of ours? And what's a stingy cent a pound on beans?"

"Great guns!" said the son and heir again.

III.

THIS Saturday night there was no drizzle, and the air was balmy, and the grocer had not forgotten to give Peter Smith the two sticks of candy for his children, yet Peter Smith had to make an extra effort to whistle when he reached the mouth of the alley.

As on every evening, so this evening, boy and girl ran giggling to meet him and cling to his coat-tails.

"Tanny again!" Peter said, speaking quickly so that his offspring could not ask questions. "A yellow stick for son and a red stick for sister. And some nice corn meal for mama to make batter cakes out of! Won't that be dandy for breakfast in the morning?"

He had been walking rapidly, and now they were at the front door of the shack, and Mrs. Peter saluted her husband with a kiss and began taking the bundles from his arms. Again she prepared the supper while Peter hurried into the corner of the kitchen and began washing his face and hands.

Often during the meal Mrs. Peter glanced across the table at Peter, and she knew that something had gone wrong, and fear clutched at her heart, but she kept up a conversation with the children until supper was ended.

Once more Peter lighted his pipe and gave the children their candy; and presently Mrs. Peter sat across the table from him.

"Any news?" she asked.

"Yes," said Peter in a hoarse voice.

"Peter! You're—you're not—?"

"No, I'm not fired," said Peter. "But they have cut wages a cent an hour for a few weeks—doing that to keep on all the men during the slack season, they

say. Do you know what that means, Mary? It means forty-eight cents a week, and that's mighty close to half a dollar. And a half dollar buys us beans for a week. And beans—"

"What is it, Peter?"

"Why, beans have gone up again, Mary. They're fourteen cents a pound now, and may go higher, so the grocer says. Shortage of the crop, I guess."

"Then we can't—"

"Not—not to-morrow, Mary," Peter Smith said, and he got up and paced to the door and back, forgetting to puff at his pipe. "I'm—I'm awfully sorry."

"I know, Peter. It isn't your fault."

"And the summer is young yet," he said. "Maybe I can get something to do a couple of evenings. It'd take only a little more than a dollar, but a dollar—gosh! Wages down and beans up! I suppose it wouldn't make much difference to some folks—"

"Now, Peter! Don't you begin worrying! Everything's all right. We're lots better off than some."

The Saturday night before he had begged her not to be pessimistic, and had explained things in this same way. Now that he was downhearted for the moment, it was the wife's duty to be the cheering one. Not such a bad philosophy that.

"Go ocean?" their small son asked.

Peter turned his face away. Mrs. Peter answered the boy's question by changing the subject, telling the children stories until they were ready for bed.

Peter's good spirits had returned by Monday morning, and he whistled as he walked his five miles to work. He was glad that a kind employer had cut wages rather than lay off a third of the men—he might have been included in the third. What fools men were to say that employers always ground employees beneath the heels of their shoes! Of course, it was bad that beans had gone up again, but there was a reason for that, too.

Why didn't the bean growers raise more? They might have known there'd be a greater demand for beans with meat

so high. It was too bad there was a shortage!

Peter Smith worked through the week as usual, and only on Saturday night as he walked home did his spirits fall again—for he knew the boy would be asking the eternal Saturday-night question regarding the trip to the beach.

The children met him as usual, this time shouting with glee, and this time his attempt to keep them from asking questions availed him nothing.

"How early have we to get up?" the boy demanded.

"Goin' sea beach!" said the daughter.

"Not to-morrow," Peter said sadly.

"Mama say yes," the boy responded. "She iron sister's dress."

This was a tragedy, Peter thought. Surely Mrs. Peter had not put false hopes in the hearts of her little children! Mrs. Peter surely knew that they couldn't afford the beach trip.

They reached the door of the shack, and Mrs. Peter met them, her eyes glistening. Peter kissed her and went on into the kitchen to wash.

"Peter—I—I hope you'll not be angry," Mrs. Peter said. "I just couldn't let the children be disappointed again, and the summer is passing."

"I know, Mary—but how can we afford it? There—there! I guess we can if we be mighty careful a couple of weeks."

Mrs. Peter pressed a dollar and a quarter into his palm.

"There, Peter," she said. "Now don't be angry. It is only for just this once."

"But how—?"

"I—I got a couple of washings to do, Peter."

"Mary!"

"It didn't hurt me a bit, Peter."

"But I've told you I can't have that, Mary! You haven't been strong since the last baby—"

"I took my time, Peter, and it didn't hurt me a bit. And I'll not do it again. I wanted to take the babies so much."

Peter looked down at her, and the tears

were very near to coming. He kissed her awkwardly.

"All right," he said. "We'll make the most of it, then. We'll talk about it this evening, so the kiddies will be anticipating, and we'll give them the time of their lives to-morrow. I suppose we'd better get up in time to catch the first train—"

They caught the first train, and they arrived at the beach at an early hour. Hand in hand, the boy and girl stood at the edge of the water and faced the unfathomable mystery of the ocean. Peter and Mrs. Peter sat down on the hard sand, and fixed a blanket for the baby, and drank in the stiff, sea air.

Then they had luncheon, and watched the crowds that came later, and stared at the flaring signs on the sideshows; and Peter even purchased a bag of peanuts and took the boy and girl for one ride

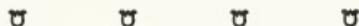
on the merry-go-round. They had planned to make the most of this single day at the beach, to gain which Mrs. Peter had worked in the heat over a washtub, while Peter worked in the clay at the brick-yard to get money to buy beans.

And toward evening a beautiful small cruising yacht steamed slowly by and anchored off one of the fashionable hotels.

"Peter! Wouldn't it be great to own a boat like that?" Mrs. Peter gasped. "And to take a ride in it on the ocean! Oh, if only, some time, we could only get on one and just look around! Wouldn't it be glorious?"

"Own a boat like *that*?" Peter exclaimed. "Yes, I might, in about five million years! I'll bet she cost as much as three thousand dollars! Nope, I guess I'll never buy a boat like that!"

Peter had purchased a part of that one, but he did not know. It was the Irene.



LABOR

BY W. H. MURCAR

WHÈRE the engine roars, where the derrick soars,

Where the dynamite rips the rock;

Where the hammer swings and the steel drill rings

As it drives through the stony block;

Where the shining rail meets the wide-spread sail,

Where the giant liners ride;

Where the roaring mills take toll of the hills

Where the precious metals hide;

Where the tunnel winds, where the millstone grinds,

Where the steam hammer's mighty shock

Shows to what length I can put my strength

When difficulties seem to mock;

Where the woodsman fells, where the miner delves

In the shaft-sunk mountainside;

From the mighty lakes to where Atlantic takes

The blue Pacific for his bride;

It is there you'll find, 'mid the toil and grind,

That I reign supreme on the sphere;

For the things that count from my energy mount

And make me the ruler here.

The Gun Brand

by James B. Hendryx

Author of "The Promise," "The One Big Thing," "Marquard the Silent," etc.

SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS

CHLOE ELLISTON, inheriting the love of adventure and ambitious to emulate her famous grandfather, "Tiger" Elliston, who had played a big part in the civilizing of Malaysia, sets out for the Far North to establish a school and bring the light of education to the Indians and breeds of the Athabasca country. Accompanied by a companion, Harriet Penny, and a Swedish maid, Big Lena, she arrives at Athabasca Landing and engages transportation on one of the scows of Pierre Lapierre, an independent trader. Vermilion, the boss scowman, decides to kidnap the party and hold them to ransom; but Lapierre, getting wind of his plans, interrupts them at a vital moment, kills Vermilion, and rescues the girl. Predisposed in his favor, she accepts him as her mentor in the wilderness, believing all he tells her, especially about one Robert MacNair, another free-trader who Lapierre saddles with a most villainous reputation and the epithet of "Brute." On Lapierre's advice Chloe establishes herself at the mouth of the Yellow Knife River on Great Slave Lake, and starts to building her school, *et cetera*. Then Brute MacNair turns up, and in the interview that follows Chloe finds much to disturb her peace of mind, though she meets the free-trader boldly and dares him to interfere with her or her work. Chloe goes to MacNair's place on Snare Lake, believing that Lapierre has gone south; has an interview with MacNair which places him in a very different light, but it is interrupted by Lapierre, who suddenly appears, and when MacNair turns, shoots him. Lapierre convinces the girl that he has come in her defense and that the shooting was unavoidable. MacNair, before he becomes unconscious, shows that he believes the whole thing a plant, with the girl acting as decoy. Chloe dresses his wound and takes him, still unconscious, to her post. Lapierre, coming to see her while she is nursing the wounded man, makes love to her, and manages to slip some tablets into MacNair's medicine. Suspecting that Big Lena has seen his act, however, he manages to knock the glass over before leaving.

CHAPTER XII.

A FIGHT IN THE NIGHT.

THE days immediately following Lapierre's departure were busy days for Chloe Elliston. The word had passed along the lakes and the rivers, and stolid, sullen-faced Indians stole in from the scrub to gaze apathetically at the buildings on the banks of the Yellow Knife. Chloe with painstaking repetition,

through Lefroy as interpreter, explained to each the object of her school; with the result that a goodly number remained and lost no time in installing themselves in the commodious barracks.

On the evening of the second day Chloe tiptoed into the sick-room and, bending over MacNair, was startled to encounter the steady gaze of the steel-gray eyes. "I thought you never would come to," she smiled. "You see, I don't

This story began in the All-Story Weekly for March 10.

know much about surgery, and I was afraid perhaps—”

“Perhaps Lapierre had done his work well?” Chloe started at the weak, almost gentle tones of the gruff voice she had learned to associate with this man of the north. She flushed as she met the steady, disconcerting stare of the gray eyes. “He shot on the spur of the moment. He thought you were going to shoot him.”

“And he shot from—far to the southward?”

“Oh! You do not think—you do not believe that I deliberately *lied* to you! That I *knew* Lapierre was on Snare Lake!” The words fell from her lips with an intense eagerness that carried the ring of sincerity. The hard look faded from the man’s eyes, and the bearded lips suggested just the shadow of a smile.

“No,” he answered weakly; “I do not think that. But tell me, how long have I been this way? And what has happened? For I remember nothing—after the world turned black. I am surprised that Lapierre missed me. He has the reputation for killing—at his own range.”

“But he didn’t miss you!” cried the girl in surprise. “It was his bullet that—that made the world turn black.”

“Aye; but it was a miss, just the same, and a miss, I am thinking, that will cost him dear. He should have killed me.”

“Please do not talk,” said the girl in sudden alarm, and taking the medicine from the table, held the spoon to the man’s lips. He swallowed its contents, and was about to speak when Chloe interrupted him. “Please do not talk,” she begged, “and I’ll tell you what happened. There is not much to tell: after we bound up your wounds we brought you here, where I could give you proper care. It took three days to do this, and two days have passed since we arrived.”

“I knew I was in your—”

Chloe flushed deeply. “Yes, in my room,” she hastened to interrupt him; “but you must not talk. It was the only place I knew where you could be quiet and—and safe.”

“But, Lapierre—why did he allow it?”

Chloe flushed. “Allow it! I do not take orders from Mr. Lapierre, nor from you, nor from anybody else. This is my school; this cottage is mine; I’ll do as I please with it, and I’ll bring who I please into it without asking permission from any one.”

While she was speaking, the man’s glance strayed from her flashing eyes to the face of a tarnished, smoke-blackened portrait that showed indistinct in the dull lamplight of the little room. Chloe’s glance followed MacNair’s, and as the little clock ticked sharply both stared in silence into the lean, lined features of Tiger Elliston.

“Your eyes,” murmured the man—“sometimes they are like that.” Suddenly the man’s voice strengthened. He continued to gaze at the face in the dull gold frame. With an effort he withdrew an arm from beneath the cover and pointed with a finger that trembled weakly. “I should like to have known him,” he said. “By God, yon is the face of a man!”

“My grandfather,” muttered the girl.

“You’ll love the north—when you know it,” said MacNair. “Tell me, did Lapierre advise you to bring me here?”

“No,” answered Chloe, “he did not. He—he said to leave you; that your Indians would care for you.”

“And my Indians—did they not follow you?” Chloe shook her head. Once more MacNair bent a searching glance upon the girl’s face. “Where is Lapierre?” he asked.

“He is gone,” Chloe answered. “Two days ago he left for the—” She hesitated as there flashed through her brain the moment on Snare Lake when, once before, she had answered MacNair’s question in almost the same words. “*He said* he was going to the southward,” she corrected.

MacNair smiled. “I think, this time, he has gone. But why he left without killing me I cannot understand. Lapierre has made a mistake.”

“You do him an injustice! Mr. La-

pierre does not want to kill you. He is sorry he was forced to shoot; but, as he said, it was your life or his. And now please do be quiet, or I must leave you to yourself."

MacNair closed his eyes, and, seating herself by the table, Chloe stared silently into the face of the portrait until the man's deep, regular breathing told her that he slept.

Slowly the moments passed, and the girl's gaze roved from the face of the portrait along the walls of the little room. Suddenly her eyes dilated in horror; for there, tight pressed against an upper pane of the window, whose lower sash was daintily curtained with chintz, appeared a dark, scowling face—the face of an Indian, which she instantly recognized as one of the two who had accompanied MacNair upon his first visit to her clearing.

Even as she looked the face vanished, leaving the girl staring wide-eyed at the black square of the window. Curbing her impulse to awake MacNair, she stole softly from the room and, unlocking the outer door, sped swiftly through the darkness toward the little square of light that glowed from the window of the store.

The distance was not great from the door of the cottage to the soft square of radiance that showed distinctly in the darkness. But even as Chloe ran the light was suddenly extinguished, and the outlines of the big storehouse loomed vague and huge and indistinct against the black background of the encircling scrub. The girl stopped abruptly and stared uncertainly into the darkness. Her heart beat wildly. A strange sense of terror came over her as she stood alone, surrounded by the blackness of the clearing. Why had Lefroy extinguished his light? And why was the night so still?

She strained to catch the familiar sounds of the wilderness—the little night sounds to which she had grown accustomed: the bellowing of frogs in the sedges, the chirp of tree-toads, and the harsh squawk of startled night-fowls.

Even the air seemed unnaturally still, and the ceaseless drone of the mosquitoes served but to intensify the unnatural silence. The mosquitoes broke the spell of the nameless terror, and she slapped viciously at her face and neck.

"I'm a fool," she muttered; "a perfect fool! Lefroy puts out his light every night and—and what if there are no sounds? I'm just listening for something to be afraid of."

She glanced backward toward her own cottage, where the light still glowed from the window. It was reassuring, that little square of yellow lamplight that shone softly from the window of her room. She was not afraid now. She would return to the cottage and lock the door. She shuddered at the thought. Before her rose the vision of that dark, shadowy face, tight-pressed against the glass. Instinctively she knew that Indian was not alone. There were others, and—once more her eyes swept the blackness.

Suddenly the question flashed through her brain: Why should these Indians seek to avenge MacNair—the man who held the power of life and death over them—who had practically forced them into servitude? Then, swift as the question, flashed the answer: It was not to avenge MacNair they came, but, knowing that he was helpless, to strike the blow that would free themselves from the yoke. Had Lapierre known this? Would he have left him then, knowing that the man's own Indians would finish the work his bullet had only half completed? No! Lapierre would not have done that. Did he not say: "I am glad I did not kill him"? He was thinking only of her safety.

"We'll be safe enough till morning," she muttered. "Surely I have read somewhere that Indians never attack in the night. To-morrow we must hide MacNair where they cannot find him. They will murder him, now that he is wounded. How they must hate him! Must hate the man who has oppressed and debauched, and cheated them!"

The girl had nearly reached the door of the cottage when once more she halted, rooted in her tracks. Out of the unnatural silence of the night, close upon the edge of the clearing, boomed the cry of the great horned owl. It was a sound she had often heard here in the northern night—this hooting of an owl; but, somehow, this sound was different. Once more her heart thumped wildly against her ribs. Her fists clenched, and she peered tensely toward the wall of the scrub timber that showed silent and black and impenetrable in the little light of the stars. Again the portentous silence, and then—was it fancy, or were there shapes, stealthy, elusive, shadowy, moving along the wall of the intense blackness?

A light suddenly flashed from the window of the storehouse. It disappeared. The great door banged sharply, and out of the blackness sounded a rush of moccasin feet, padding the earth as they ran.

From the edge of the timber—from the direction of the shadowy shapes—came a long, thin spurt of flame, and the silence was broken by the roar of a smooth-bore rifle. The next instant the roar was increased tenfold, and from the loopholes high on the walls of the storehouse flashed other thin red spurts of flame.

Terror-stricken, Chloe dashed for the cottage. Along the entire length of the timber-line spikes of flame belched forth, and the crash and roar or rifles drowned the rush of the moccasin feet. A form dashed past her in the darkness, and then another, forcing Chloe from the path. The terrified girl realized that these forms were speeding straight for the door of the cottage. Her first thought was for Mac-Nair. He would be murdered as he slept.

She redoubled her efforts, feeling blindly in the darkness for the path that led toward the square of light. In her ears sounded the sharp jangle of smashing glass. Her foot caught in a vine, and she crashed heavily forward almost at the door. All about her guns roared; from the edge of the scrub, from the river-

bank, and from the corners of the long log dormitories. Bullets whined above her like angry mosquitoes, and thudded dully against the logs of the cottage.

Again sounded the sharp jangle of glass. She struggled to her knees, and was hurled backward as the huge form of an Indian tripped over her and sprawled, cursing, at her side. The door of the cottage burst suddenly open, and in the long quadrangle of light the forms of the two Indians who had passed her stood out distinctly. The girl gave a quick, short sob of relief. They were Lefroy's Indians! At the sound the man on the ground thrust his face close to hers and with a quick grunt of surprise scrambled to his feet. Chloe felt her arm seized, and realized that she was being dragged toward the door of the cottage, through which the other two Indians had disappeared. She was jerked roughly across the threshold, and lay huddled up on the floor. The Indian released his hold on her arm and, stepping across her body, reached for the door.

Outside, the roar of the guns was incessant. Suddenly, close at hand, Chloe heard a quick, wicked spat, and the Indian reeled from the doorway, whirled as on a pivot, and crashed, face downward, across the table. There was a loud rattle of porcelain dishes, a rifle rang sharply upon the floor boards, and Chloe gazed in horrid fascination as the limp form of the Indian slipped slowly from the table. Its momentum increased, and the back of the man's head struck the floor with a sickening thump. The face turned toward her—a face wet and dripping with the rich red blood that oozed thickly from the irregular hole in the forehead where the soft, round ball from a smooth bore had torn into the brain. The wide eyes stared stonily into her own. The jaws sagged open, and the nearly severed tongue protruded from between the fang-like yellow teeth.

Some one blew out the lamp. The door slammed shut. Chloe felt strong hands beneath her shoulders; the voice

of Big Lena sounded in her ears, and she was being guided through the pitch blackness to the door of her own room. The lamp by the bedside had also been extinguished, and the girl glanced toward the window, which showed in the feeble starlight a pattern of jagged panes. One of the Indians who had preceded her into the cottage thrust the barrel of a rifle through the aperture and fired rapidly at the flashes of flame in the clearing.

In the other room some one was shrieking, and Chloe recognized the voice of Harriet Penny. Big Lena left her side, and a moment later the shrieking ceased, or, rather, quieted to a series of terrified, choking grunts and muffled cries, as though something soft and thick had been forcibly applied as a gag. Chloe groped her way blindly toward the bed, where she had left the wounded man. Her feet stumbled awkwardly through the confusion of débris that was the wreck of the overturned medicine table.

"Are you hurt?" she gasped as she sank trembling upon the edge of the bed. Close beside her sounded the sharp snap of metal as the Indian jammed fresh cartridges into his magazine.

"No!" said a voice in her ear. "I'm not hurt. Are you?" Chloe shook her head, forgetting that in the intense blackness she had returned no answer. There was a movement upon the bed; a huge hand closed roughly about her arm. The Indian was firing again.

"Tell me, are you hurt?" rasped a voice in her ear. And her arm was shaken almost fiercely.

"No!" she managed to gasp, struggling to free herself. "But oh, it's all too, too horrible, too awful! There is a dead man in the other room. He is one of Lefroy's Indians. One of *my* Indians, and they shot him!"

"I'm damned glad of it!" growled MacNair thickly, and Chloe leaped from the bed. The coarse brutality of the man was inconceivable. In her mingled emotion of rage and loathing, she hated this man with a fierce, savage hatred that

could kill. She knew now why men called him Brute MacNair. The name fitted! These Indians had rushed from the security of the fortlike storehouse upon the first intimation of danger to protect the defenseless quartet in the cottage — the three women and the wounded, helpless man. In the very doorway of the cottage one had been killed — killed facing the enemy — the savage bloodthirsty horde who, having learned of the plight of their oppressor, had taken the warpath to avenge their wrongs. Surely MacNair must know that this man had died as much in the defense of him as of the women. And yet, when he learned of the death of this man, he had said: "I am damned glad of it!"

How long Chloe stood there speechless, trembling, with her heart fairly bursting with rage, she did not know. Time ceased to be. Suddenly she realized that the room was no longer in intense darkness. Objects appeared dim and indistinct: the bed with the wounded man, the contents of the table strewn in confusion upon the floor, and the Indian shooting from the window. Then the flare of flames met her eyes. The walls of the storehouse stood out distinctly from its black background of timber. Savage forms appeared in the clearing, gliding stealthily from stump to stump.

The light grew brighter. She could hear now, mingled with the sharp crack of the rifles, the dull roar of flames. The dormitories were burning! This added to her consuming rage. Her eyes seemed fairly to glow as she fixed them upon the pale face of MacNair, who had struggled to a sitting posture. She took a step toward the bed. A dull red spot showed on either cheek. A bullet ripped through the window and splintered the dull gold frame of Tiger Elliston's portrait, but the girl had lost all sense of fear. She shook her clenched fist in the bearded face of the man, and her voice quavered high and thin.

"You—you—damn you!" she cried. "I wish I'd left you back there to the

mercy of your savages! You're a brute—a fiend! It would serve you right if I should give you up to them! He—the man who was killed—was trying to save you from the righteous wrath of those you have ground down and oppressed!"

MacNair ignored her words, and as his eyes met hers squarely, they betrayed not the slightest emotion. The pallid features showed tense and drawn in the growing firelight. His gaze projected past her to the lean face of Tiger Elliston.

"You are a fighter at heart," he said slowly, addressing the girl. "You are his flesh and blood—and he was a fighter. He won to victory over the bodies of his enemies. In his eyes I can see it."

"He was no coward!" flashed the girl. "He never won to victory over the bodies of his friends!" With an effort the man reached for his clothing, which hung from a peg near the head of the bed.

"Where are you going?" cried the girl sharply.

"I am going," MacNair answered gravely, looking straight into her eyes, "to take my Indians back to Snare Lake."

"They will kill you!" she cried impulsively.

"They will not!" MacNair smiled; "but, if they do, you will be glad. Did you not say—"

The girl faced swiftly away, and at the same moment the Indian at the window staggered backward, dropping his rifle and cursing horribly in the only English he knew, as he clutched frantically at his shoulder. Chloe turned. MacNair was lacing his boots. He raised weakly to his feet, swaying uncertainly, with his hand pressed against his chest, and laughed harshly into the pain-twisted features of the Indian.

"When the last of yon dogs gets his bullet I can leave this place in safety."

"What do you mean?" cried the girl, her eyes blazing.

"I mean," rasped the man, "that you are a fool! You have listened to Lapierre and you have easily become his

dupe. There is no Indian in his employ who would not kill me. They have had their orders. Have you stopped to reflect that the brave Lapierre did not himself remain to stem this attack? To protect me from my Indians?"

The sneer in MacNair's voice was not lost upon the girl, who drew herself up haughtily.

"Mr. Lapierre," she answered, "could hardly be charged with anticipating this attack, nor could he be blamed for not altering his plans to fight *your* battles."

MacNair laughed. "The idea of Lapierre fighting *my* battles is, indeed, unique. And you may be sure that Lapierre will not fight his own battles—as long as he can find others to fight them for him. Miss Elliston, this attack *was* anticipated. Lapierre knew to a certainty that when my Indians read the signs, and learned what had happened there on the shore of Snare Lake, their vengeance would not be delayed." He looked straight into the eyes of the girl. "Did you arm your Indians?"

"I did not!" answered Chloe. "I brought no guns."

"Then where did your Indians get their rifles?"

"Well, really, Mr. MacNair, I cannot tell you. Possibly at the same place your Indians got theirs. The Indians who have come to me here are hunters and trappers. Is it so extraordinary that men who are hunters should own guns?"

"Your ignorance would be amusing, if it were not tragic!" retorted MacNair. And picking up the gun which the wounded Indian had dropped, held it before the eyes of the girl. "The hunters of the north, Miss Elliston, do not equip themselves with Mausers."

"With Mausers!" cried the girl. "You mean—"

"I mean just this," broke in MacNair, "that your Indians were armed to kill men, not animals. With, or without, your knowledge or sanction, your Indians have been supplied with the best rifles obtainable. Your school is Lapierre's fort!"

Thrusting the rifle into the hands of the girl, he brushed past her and with difficulty made his way through the intervening room to the outer door, which he threw open.

Chloe followed. Outside the firing continued with undiminished intensity, but the girl was conscious of no sense of fear. Her eyes swept the room, flooded now by the glare of the flaring flames. Beside the stove stood Big Lena, an ax gripped tightly in her strong hands. The remaining Indian lay upon the floor, firing slowly through a loophole punched in the chinking. At the doorway MacNair turned, and in the strong light Chloe noticed that his face was haggard and drawn with pain.

"I thank you," he said, touching his bandaged chest, "for your nursing. It has probably saved my life."

"Come back! They will kill you!" MacNair ignored her warning. "You have one redeeming feature," cried the girl. "At least, you are as brutal toward yourself as toward others."

MacNair laughed harshly. "I thank you," he said and staggered out into the fire-lit clearing. Dully Chloe noticed that the Indian who had been firing from the floor slipped stealthily through the doorway and, dropping to his knee, raised his rifle. The next instant the girl's eyes widened in horror. The gun was pointed squarely at MacNair's back. She tried to cry out, but no sound came. It seemed minutes that the Indian sighted as he knelt there in the clearing. And then—he pulled the trigger. There was a sharp, metallic click, followed by a muttered imprecation. The man jerked down the rifle and reaching into his pocket, produced long yellow cartridges, which he jammed into the magazine.

The horror of it! The diabolical deliberation of the man spurred the girl to a fury she had never known. In that moment her one thought was to kill—to kill with her hands—to tear—and to maim! For the first time she realized that the thing in her hand was a gun.

Again the Indian was raising his rifle. The girl twisted and jerked at the bolt of her own gun. It was locked. The next instant, with a loud, animal-like cry, she leaped for the doorway, trampling, as she passed, with a wild, fierce joy-upon the upturned staring face of the dead Indian.

Out in the clearing the flames roared and crackled. Rifles spat. And before her the Indian was again lining his sights. Grasping the heavy rifle by the barrel, Chloe whirled it high above her and brought it down with a crash upon the head of the kneeling savage. The man crumpled as dead men crumple—in an ugly, twisted heap. Fierce, swift exultation shot through the girl's brain as she stood beside the formless thing on the ground. She looked up—squarely into the eyes of MacNair, who had turned at the sound of her outcry.

"I said you would fight!" called the man. "I have seen it in your eyes. They are the eyes of the man on the wall."

Then, abruptly, he turned and disappeared in the direction of the river.

CHAPTER XIII.

LAPIERRE RETURNS FROM THE SOUTH.

WHEN Pierre Lapierre left Chloe Elliston's school after the completion of the buildings, he proceeded at once to his own rendezvous on Lac du Mort.

This shrewdly chosen stronghold was situated on a high, jutting point that rose abruptly from the waters of the inland lake, which surrounded it upon three sides. The land side was protected by an enormous black spruce swamp. This headland terminated in a small, rock-rimmed plateau, perhaps three acres in extent, and was so situated as to be practically impregnable against the attack of an ordinary force; the rim-rocks forming a natural barricade which reduced the necessity for artificial fortification to a minimum. Across the neck of the tiny

peninsula Lapierre had thrown a strong stockade of logs, and from the lake access was had only by means of a narrow, one-man trail that slanted and twisted among the rocks of the precipitous cliff side.

The plateau itself was sparsely covered with a growth of stunted spruce and balsamian, which served as a screen both for the stockade and the long, low, fort-like building of logs, which was Lapierre's main cache for the storing of fur, goods of barter, and contraband whisky. The fort was provisioned to withstand a siege, and it was there that the crafty quarter-breed had succeeded in storing two hundred Mauser rifles and many cases of ammunition. Among Lapierre's followers it was known as the "Bastile du Mort." A safe haven of refuge for the hard-pressed, and, in event of necessity, the one place in all the north where they might hope indefinitely to defy their enemies.

The secret of this fort had been well guarded, and outside of Lapierre's organized band, but one man knew its location—and few even guessed its existence. There were vague rumors about the Hudson Bay posts, and in the barracks of the Mounted, that Lapierre maintained such a fort, but its location was accredited to one of the numerous islands of the extreme western arm of Great Slave Lake.

Bob MacNair knew of the fort, and the rifles, and the whisky. He knew, also, that Lapierre did not know that he knew, and therein, at the proper time, would lie his advantage. The Hudson Bay Company had no vital interest in verifying the rumor, nor had the men of the Mounted, for as yet Lapierre had succeeded in avoiding suspicion except in the minds of a very few. And these few, realizing that if Lapierre was an outlaw, he was by far the shrewdest and most dangerous outlaw with whom they had ever been called upon to deal, were very careful to keep their suspicions to themselves, until such time as they could catch him with the goods—after that would come the business of tracking him to his lair. And they knew to a certainty

that the men would not be wanting who could do this—no matter how shrewdly that lair was concealed.

Upon arriving at Lac du Mort, Lapierre ordered the canoemen to load the fur, proceed at once to the mouth of the Slave River, transfer it to the scows, and immediately start upon the track-line journey to Athabasca Landing. His own canoe he loaded with rifles and ammunition, and returned to the Yellow Knife. It was then he learned that Chloe had gone to Snare Lake, and while he little relished an incursion into MacNair's domain, he secreted the rifles in the storehouse and set out forthwith to overtake her. Despite the fact that he knew the girl to be strongly prejudiced against MacNair, Lapierre had no wish for her to see his colony in its normal condition of peace and prosperity. And so, pushing his canoemen to the limit of their endurance, he overtook her as she talked with MacNair by the side of his mother's grave.

Creeping noiselessly through the scrub to the very edge of the tiny clearing, Lapierre satisfied himself that MacNair was unattended by his Indians. The man's back was turned toward him, and the quarter-breed noticed that, as he talked, he leaned upon his rifle. It was a chance in a thousand. Never before had he caught MacNair unprepared—and the man's blood would be upon his own head. Drawing the revolver from its holster, he timed his movements to the fraction of a second; and deliberately snapped a twig. MacNair whirled like a flash, and Lapierre fired. His bullet went an inch too high, and when Chloe insisted upon carrying the wounded man to the school, Lapierre could but feebly protest.

The journey down the Yellow Knife was a nightmare for the quarter-breed, who momentarily expected an attack from MacNair's Indians. Upon their safe arrival, however, his black eyes glittered wickedly—at last MacNair was *his*. Fate had played directly into his hands. He knew the attack was inevitable, and dur-

ing the excitement—well, Lefroy could be trusted to attend to MacNair. With the rifles in the storehouse, MacNair's Indians would be beaten back, and in the event of an investigation by the Mounted, the responsibility would be laid at MacNair's door. But of that MacNair would never know, for MacNair would have passed beyond.

Knowing that the vengeance of MacNair's Indians would not be long delayed, Lapierre determined to be well away from the Yellow Knife when the attack came. However, he had no wish to leave without first assuring himself that the shooting of MacNair stood justified in the eyes of the girl, and to that end he had called upon her in her cottage.

Then it was that chance seemed to offer a safe and certain means of putting MacNair away, and he dropped the poisonous antiseptic tablets into the medicine, only to have his plan frustrated by the unexpected presence of Big Lena. He was not sure that the woman had seen his action. But he took no chances, and with an apparent awkward movement of his hat, destroyed the evidence, sought out Lefroy, who had already been warned of the impending attack, and ordered him to place three or four of his most dependable Indians in the cottage, with instructions not only to protect Chloe, but to kill MacNair.

Then he hastened southward to overtake his scowmen, who were toiling at the track-lines somewhere among the turbulent rapids of the Slave. And indeed there was need of haste. The summer was well advanced. Six hundred miles of track-line and portage lay between Great Slave Lake and Athabasca Landing. And if he was to return with the many scow-loads of supplies for Chloe Elliston's store before the water-ways became ice-locked, he had not a day nor an hour to lose.

At Point Brulee he overtook the fur-laden scows, and at Smith Landing an Indian runner reported the result of the fight, and the escape of MacNair. Lapierre smothered his rage, and with

twenty men at the track-line of each scow, bored his way southward.

A month later the gaunt, hard-bitten outfit tied up at the landing. Lapierre disposed of his fur, purchased the supplies, and within a week the outfit was again upon the river.

At the mouth of La Biche a half-dozen burlapped pieces were removed from a cache in a thicket of balsam and added to the outfit. And at Fort Chippewyan the scows with their contents were examined by two officers of the Mounted, and allowed to proceed on their way.

On the Yellow Knife Chloe Elliston anxiously awaited Lapierre's return. Under Lefroy's supervision the dormitories had been rebuilt, and a few sorry-looking, one-room cabins erected, which families of Indians occupied.

Through the long days of the late summer and early fall, Indians had passed and repassed upon the river, and always, in answer to the girl's questioning, they spoke of the brutality of MacNair. Of how men were made to work from daylight to dark in his mines. And of the fact that no matter how hard they worked, they were always in his debt. They told how he plied them with whisky, and the hunger and misery of the women and children. All this the girl learned through her interpreter, Lefroy; and not a few of these Indians remained to take up their abode in dormitories or cabins, until the little settlement boasted some thirty or forty colonists.

It was hard, discouraging work, this striving to implant the rudiments of education in the minds of the sullen, apathetic savages, whose chief ambition was to gorge themselves into stupidity with food from the storehouse. With the adults the case seemed hopeless. And, indeed, the girl attempted little beyond instruction in the simplest principles of personal and domestic cleanliness and order. Even this met with no response, until she established a daily inspection, and it became known that the filthy should also go hungry.

With the children, Chloe made some slight headway, but only at the expense of unceasing, monotonous repetition, and even she was forced to admit that the results were far from encouraging. The little savages had no slightest conception of any pride or interest in their daily tasks, but followed unvaryingly the line of least resistance as delineated by a simple system of rewards and punishments.

The men had shown no aptitude for work of any kind, and now when the ice skimmed thinly the edges of the lake and rivers, they collected their traps and disappeared into the timber, cheerfully leaving the women and children to be fed and cared for at the school. As the days shortened and the nights grew longer, the girl realized, with bitterness in her heart, that almost the only thing she had accomplished along educational lines was the imperfect smattering of the Indian tongues that she herself had acquired.

But her chieftest anxiety was a more material one, and Lapierre's appearance with the supplies became a matter of the gravest importance, for upon their departure the trappers had drawn heavily upon the slender remaining stores, with a result that the little colony on the Yellow Knife was already reduced to half rations, and was entirely dependent upon the scows for the winter's supply of provisions.

Not since the night of the battle had Chloe heard directly from MacNair. He had not visited the school, nor had he expressed a word of regret, or apology for the outrage. He ignored her existence completely, and the girl guessed that many of the Indians who refused her invitation to camp in the clearing, as they passed and repassed upon the river, did so in obedience to MacNair's command.

In spite of her abhorrence for the man, she resented his total disregard of her existence. Indeed, she would have welcomed a visit from him, if for no other reason than because he was a white man. She spent many hours in framing bitter denunciations to be used in event of his

appearance. But he did not appear, and resentment added to the anger in her heart, until in her mind he became the embodiment of all that was despicable, and brutish, and evil.

More than once she was upon the point of attempting another visit to Snare Lake, and in all probability she would have done so had not Big Lena flatly refused to accompany her under any circumstances whatever. And this attitude the huge Swedish woman stubbornly maintained, preserving a haughty indifference alike to Chloe's taunts of cowardice, promise of reward, and threats of dismissal. Whereupon Chloe broached the subject to Harriet Penny, and that valiant soul promptly flew into hysteria, so that for three days Chloe did double duty in the school. After that she nursed her wrath in silence and brooded upon the wrongs of MacNair's Indians.

This continued brooding was not without its effect upon the girl, and slowly but surely destroyed her sense of proportion. No longer was the education and civilization of the Indians the uppermost thought in her mind. With Lapierre, she came to regard the crushing of MacNair's power as the most important and altogether desirable undertaking that could possibly be consummated.

While in this frame of mind, just at sunset of a keen October day, the cry of "*la brigade! la brigade!*" reached her ears as she sat alone in her room in the cottage, and rushing to the river bank she joined the Indians who swarmed to the water's edge to welcome the huge freight canoe that had rounded the point below the clearing. Chloe clapped her hands in sheer joy and relief, for there, proud and erect, in the bow of the canoe stood Lapierre, and behind him from bank to bank the Yellow Knife fairly swarmed with other full-freighted canoes. The supplies had arrived!

Even as the bow of his canoe scraped the bank, Lapierre was at her side. Chloe felt her hand pressed between his—felt the grip of his strong fingers, and flushed

deeply as she realized that not alone because of the supplies was she glad that he had come. And then, his voice was in her ears, and she was listening as he told her how good it was to stand once more at her side, and look into the face whose image had spurred him to almost superhuman effort, throughout the days and the nights of the long river trail.

Lightly she answered him, and Lapierre's heart bounded at the warmth of her welcome. He turned with a word to his canoemen, and Chloe noted with admiration, how one and all they sprang to do his bidding. She marveled at his authority. Why did these men leap to obey his slightest command, when Lefroy, to obtain even the half-hearted obedience she required of her Indians, was forced to brow-beat and bully them? Her heart warmed to the man as she thought of the slovenly progress of her school. Here was one who could help her. One who could point with the finger of a master of men to the weak spots in her system.

Suddenly her brow clouded. For, as she looked upon Lapierre, the words of MacNair flashed through her mind, as he stood weak from his wounds, in the dimness of her fire-lit room. Her eyes hardened, and unconsciously her chin thrust outward, as she realized that before she could ask this man's aid, there were things he must explain.

Darkness settled, and at a word from Lapierre, fires flared out on the beach and in the clearing, and by their light the long line of canoemen conveyed the pieces upon their heads into the wide door of the storehouse. It was a weird, fantastic scene. The long line of pack-laden men, toiling up the bank between the rows of flaring fires, to disappear in the storehouse; and the long line returning empty-handed to toil again, to the storehouse. After a time Lapierre called Lefroy to his side and uttered a few terse commands. The man nodded, and took Lapierre's place at the head of the steep slope to the river. The quarter-breed turned to the girl.

"Come," he said, smiling, "Lefroy can handle them now. May we not go to your cottage? I would hear of your progress—the progress of your school. And also," he bowed, "is it not possible that the great, what do you call her, Lena, has prepared supper? I've eaten nothing since morning."

"Forgive me!" cried the girl. "I had completely forgotten supper. But, the men? Have they not eaten since morning?"

Lapierre smiled. "They will eat," he answered, "when their work is done."

Supper over, the two seated themselves upon the little veranda. Along the beach the fires still flared, and still the men, like a huge, slow-moving endless chain, carried the supplies to the storehouse. Lapierre waved his hand toward the scene.

"You see now," he smiled, "why I built the storehouse—so large?"

Chloe nodded, and regarded him intently. "Yes, I see that," she answered gravely, "but there are things I do not see. Of course you have heard of the attack by MacNair's Indians?"

Lapierre assented. "At Smith Landing I heard it," he answered, and waited for her to proceed.

"Had you expected this attack?"

Lapierre glanced at her in well-feigned surprise.

"Had I expected it, Miss Elliston, do you think I would have gone to the southward? Would I have left you to the mercy of those brutes? When I thought you were in danger on Snare Lake, did I—"

The girl interrupted him with a gesture. "No! No! I do not think you anticipated the attack, but—"

Lapierre finished her sentence. "But, MacNair told you I did, and that I had timed accurately my trip to the southward? What else did he tell you?"

"He told me," answered Chloe, "that had you not anticipated the attack you would not have armed my Indians with Mausers. He said that my Indians were

armed to kill *men*, not animals." She paused and looked directly into his eyes. "Mr. Lapierre, where did those rifles come from?"

Lapierre answered without a moment's hesitation. "From my—cache to the westward." He leaned closer. "I told you once before," he said, "that I could place a hundred guns in the hands of your Indians, and you forbade me. While I could remain in the north, I bowed to your wishes. I know the north and its people, and I knew you would be safer with the rifles than without them. In event of an emergency, the fact that your Indians were armed with guns that would shoot farther, and harder, and faster, than the guns of your enemies, would offset, in a great measure, their advantage in numbers. It seems that my judgment was vindicated. I disobeyed you flatly. But, surely, you will not blame me! Oh! If you knew—"

Chloe interrupted him.

"Don't!" she cried sharply. "Please—not that! I—I think I understand. But there are still things I do not understand. Why did one of my own Indians attempt to murder MacNair? And how did MacNair know that he would attempt to murder him? He said you had ordered it so. And the man was one of your Indians—one of those you left with Lefroy."

Lapierre nodded. "Do you not see, Miss Elliston, that MacNair is trying by every means in his power to discredit me in your eyes? Apatawa, the Indian you—" Chloe shuddered as he paused, and he hastened on—"The Indian who attempted to shoot MacNair, was originally one of MacNair's own Indians—one of the few who dared to desert him. And, for the wrongs he had suffered, he had sworn to kill MacNair."

"But, knowing that, why did Lefroy send him to the cottage?"

"That," answered Lapierre gravely, "is something I do not know. I must first question Lefroy, and if I find that he thus treacherously endangered the life

of a wounded man, even though that man was MacNair, who is his enemy, and likewise my enemy, I will teach him a lesson he will not soon forget."

Chloe heaved a sigh of relief. "I am glad," she breathed softly, "that you feel that way."

"Could you doubt it?" asked the man.

Chloe hesitated. "Yes," she answered, "I *did* doubt it. How could I help but doubt, when he warned me what would happen, and it all came about as he said? I—I could not help but believe him. And now, one thing more. Can you tell me why MacNair's Indians are willing to fight to the death to save him from harm? If the things you tell me are true, and I know that they are true, because during the summer I have questioned many of MacNair's Indians, and they all tell the same story; why do they fight for him?"

Lapierre considered. "That is one of those things," he answered, "that men cannot explain. It is because of his hold upon them. Great generals have had it—this power to sway men—to command them to certain death, even though those men cursed the very ground their commanders stood upon. MacNair is a powerful personality. In all the north there is not his equal. I cannot explain it. It is a psychological problem none can explain. For, although his Indians hate him, they make no attempt to free themselves from his yoke, and they will fight to the death in defence of him."

"It is hard to believe," answered Chloe, "hard to understand. And yet, I think I do understand. He said of my grandfather, as he looked into the eyes of his portrait: 'He was a fighter. He won to victory over the bodies of his enemies.' That is MacNair's idea of greatness."

Lapierre nodded, and when he looked into the face of the girl he noted that her eyes flashed with purpose.

"Tell me," she continued almost sharply, "you are not afraid of MacNair?"

For just an instant Lapierre hesitated. "No!" he answered. "I am not afraid."

Chloe leaned toward him eagerly and placed a hand upon his arm, while her eyes seemed to search his very thoughts. "Then you will go with me to Snare Lake—to carry our war into the heart of the enemies' country?"

"To Snare Lake!" gasped the man.

"Yes, to Snare Lake. I shall never rest now until MacNair's power over these poor savages is broken forever. Until they are free from the yoke of oppression."

"But it would be suicide!" objected Lapierre. "No possible good can come of it! To kill a lion, one does not thrust his head into the lion's mouth in an effort to choke him to death. There are other ways."

Chloe laughed. "He will not harm us," she answered; "I am not going to kill him as one would kill a lion. There has been blood enough spilled already. As you say, there are other ways. We are going to Snare Lake for the purpose of procuring evidence that will convict this man in the courts."

"The courts!" cried Lapierre. "Where are the courts north of sixty?"

"North of sixty, or south of sixty, what matters it? There are courts, and there are prisons awaiting such as he. Will you go with me, or must I go alone?"

Lapierre glanced toward the flaring fires, where the endless line of canoemen still toiled from the river to the storehouse. Slowly he arose from his chair and extended his hand.

"I will go with you," he answered simply, "and now I will say good night."

CHAPTER XIV.

THE WHISKY RUNNERS.

WHEN Lapierre left Chloe Elliston's cottage, after promising to accompany her to Snare Lake, he immediately sought out Lefroy, who was superintending the distribution of the last of the supplies in the storehouse.

The two proceeded to Lefroy's room,

and at the end of an hour sought the camp of the canoemen. Ten minutes later, two lean-bodied scouts took the trail for the northward, with orders to report immediately the whereabouts of MacNair. If luck favored him, Lapierre knew that MacNair, accompanied by the pick of his hunters, would be far from Snare Lake, upon his semiannual pilgrimage to intercept the fall migration of the caribou herd, along the northernmost reaches of the barren grounds.

If MacNair had not yet started upon the fall hunt, the journey to Snare Lake must be delayed. For the crafty Lapierre had no intention whatever of risking a meeting with MacNair in the heart of his own domain. Neither had he any intention of journeying to Snare Lake for the purpose of securing evidence against MacNair to be used in a court of law. His plans for crushing MacNair's power included no aid from constituted authority.

He noted with keen satisfaction that the girl's hatred for MacNair had been greatly intensified, not so much by the attack upon her school, as by the stories she heard from the lips of Indians who passed back and forth upon the river. The posting of those Indians had been a happy bit of forethought on the part of Lapierre; and their stories had lost nothing in Lefroy's interpretation.

Lapierre contrived to make the succeeding days busy ones. By arrangement with Chloe, a system of credits had been established, and from daylight to dark he was busy about the storehouse, paying off and outfitting his canoemen, who were to fare north upon the trap-lines until the breaking up of the ice in the spring would call them once more to the lakes and the rivers, to move Lapierre's freight, handle his furs, and deliver his contraband whisky.

Each evening Lapierre repaired to the cottage, and Lefroy in his post in the storehouse nodded sagely to himself as the notes of the girl's rich contralto floated loud and clear above the twang of the accompanying guitar.

Always the quarter-breed spoke eagerly to Chloe of the proposed trip to Snare Lake, and bitterly he regretted the enforced delay incident to outfitting the trappers. And always, with the skill and finesse of the born intriguer, by a smile, a suggestion, or an adroitly worded question, he managed to foster and to intensify her hatred for Brute MacNair.

On the sixth day after their departure the scouts returned from the northward and reported that MacNair had traveled for many days across the barrens, in search of the caribou herds. Followed, then, another conference with Lefroy. The remaining canoemen were outfitted with surprising celerity. And at midnight a big freight canoe, loaded to the gunwale with an assortment of cheap knives and hatchets, bolts of gay-colored cloth, and cheaper whisky, broke through the ever thickening skim of shore ice, and headed northward under the personal direction of that master of all whisky runners, Louis Lefroy.

The next day Lapierre, with a great show of eagerness, informed Chloe that he was ready to undertake the journey to Snare Lake. Enthusiastically the girl set about her preparation, and the following morning, accompanied by Big Lena and Lapierre, took her place in a canoe manned by four lean-shouldered paddlers.

Just below "the narrows," on the northeastern shore of Snare Lake, and almost upon the site of Old Fort Enterprise, erected and occupied by Lieutenant, later Sir John, Franklin during the second winter of his first Arctic expedition, Bob MacNair had built his fort. The fort itself differed in no important particular from many of the log trading forts of the Hudson Bay Company. Grouped about the long, low building, within the enclosure of the log stockade, were the cabins of Indians who had forsaken the vicissitudes of the lean, barren grounds and attached themselves permanently to MacNair's colony.

Under his tutelage they learned to con-

vert the work of their hands into something more nearly approaching the comforts of existence than anything they had ever known. Where, as trappers of fur, they had succeeded, by dint of untold hardship and privation and suffering, in obtaining the barest necessities of life from the great fur company, they now found themselves housed in warm, comfortable cabins, eating good food, and clothing their bodies, and the bodies of their wives and children, in thick, warm clothing that defied the rigors of the Arctic winters.

While to the credit of each man, upon MacNair's books, stood an amount in tokens of "made beaver," which to any trapper in all northland would have spelled wealth beyond his wildest dreams. And so they came to respect this stern, rugged man who dealt with them fairly—to love him, and also to fear him. And upon Snare Lake his word became the law, from which there was no appeal. Tender as a woman in sickness, counting no cost or hardship too dear in the rendering of assistance to the needy, he was at the same time hard and unbending toward wilful offenders, and a very real terror to the enemies of his people.

He had killed men for selling whisky to his Indians. And those of his own people who drank the whisky he had flogged with dog-whips—floggings that had been administered in no half-hearted or uncertain manner, and that had ceased only upon the tiring of his arm. And many there were among his Indians who could testify that the arm was slow to tire.

To this little colony, upon the fourth day after its departure from Chloe Elliston's school on the Yellow Knife, came Lefroy with his freighted canoe. And because it was not his first trip among them, all knew his mission.

It so happened that at the time of MacNair's departure for the barren grounds, Sotenah, the leader of the young men, the orator who had lauded MacNair to the skies and counseled a summary wiping out of Chloe Elliston's school,

chanced to be laid up with an injury to his foot. And, as he could not accompany the hunters, MacNair placed him in charge of the fort during his absence. Upon his back Sotenah carried scars of many floggings. And the memory of these remained with him long after the deadly effects of the cheap whisky that begot them had passed away. And now, as he stood upon the shore of the lake surrounded by the old men, and the boys who were not yet permitted to take the caribou trail, his face was sullen and black as he greeted Lefroy. For the bite of the gut-lash was strong upon him.

"*B'jo! B'jo! Nitchi!*" greeted Lefroy, smiling into the scowling face.

"*B'jo!?*" grunted the younger man with evident lack of enthusiasm.

"Kah MacNair?"

The Indian returned a noncommittal shrug. Again Lefroy repeated his question, at the same time taking from his pocket a cheap clasp-knife which he extended toward the Indian. The other regarded the knife in silence; then, reaching out his hand, he took it from Lefroy and examined it gravely.

"How much?" he asked. Lefroy laughed.

"You ke'p," he said, and stepping to the canoe, threw back the blanket, exposing to the covetous eyes of the assembled Indians the huge pile of similar knives, and the hatchets, and the bolts of gay-colored goods.

A few moments of adroit questioning sufficed to acquaint Lefroy with MacNair's prices for similar goods; and the barter began.

Where MacNair and the Hudson Bay Company charged ten "skins," or "made beaver," for an article, LeFroy charged five, or four, or even three, until the crowding Indians became half-crazed with the excitement of barter. And while this excitement was at its height, with scarcely half of his goods disposed of, Lefroy suddenly declared he would sell no more, and stepping into the canoe, pushed out from the bank.

He turned a deaf ear to the frantic clamorings of those who had been unable to secure the wonderful bargains, and ordering his canoemen to paddle down the lake some two or three hundred yards, deliberately prepared to camp. Hardly had his canoe touched the shore before he was again surrounded by the clamoring mob. Whereupon he faced them and, striking an attitude, harangued them in their own tongue.

He had come, he said, hoping to find MacNair and to plead with him to deal fairly with his people. It is true that MacNair pays more for the labor of their hands than the company does for their furs, and in doing so he has proved himself a friend of the Indians. But he can well afford to pay more. Is not the *pil chickimin*—the gold—worth more even than the finest of skins?

He reached beneath the blankets and, drawing forth one of the cheap knives, held it aloft. For years, he told them, the great fur company has been robbing the Indians. Has been charging them two, three, four, and even ten times the real value of the goods they offer in barter. But the Indians have not known this. Even he, Lefroy, did not know it until the *kloshe kloochman*—the good white woman—came into the north and built a school at the mouth of the Yellow Knife. She is the real friend of the Indians. For she brought goods, even more goods than are found in the largest of the Hudson Bay posts, and she sells them at prices unheard-of—at their real value in the land of the white man.

"See now!" he cried, holding the knife aloft, "in the store of MacNair, for this knife you will pay eight skins. Who will buy it for two?"

A dozen Indians crowded forward, and the knife passed into the hands of an old squaw. Other knives and hatchets changed hands, and yards of bolt goods were sold at prices that caused the black eyes of the purchasers to glitter with greed.

"Why do you stay here?" cried Le-

froy suddenly. "Oh! my people, why do you remain to toil all your lives in the mines—to be robbed of the work of your hands? Come to the Yellow Knife and join those who are already enjoying the fruits of their labors! Where all have plenty, and none are asked to toil and dig in the dirt of the mines. Where all that is required is to sit in the school and learn from books, and become wise in the ways of the white man."

The half-breed paused, swaying his body to and fro as he gazed intently into the eyes of the greed-crazed horde. Suddenly his voice arose almost to a shriek. "You are free men—dwellers in a free land! Who is MacNair, that he should hold you in servitude? Why should you toil to enrich him? Why should you bow down beneath his tyranny? Who is *he* to make laws that you shall obey?" He shifted his gaze up to the upturned face of Sotenah. "Who is he to say: 'You shall drink no firewater'? And who is he to flog you when you break that law? I tell you in the great storehouse on the Yellow Knife is firewater for all! The white man's drink! The drink that makes men strong—and happy—and wise as gods!"

He called wildly. Two of his canoe-men rolled a cask to his feet, and, upending it, broached in the head. Seizing a tin cup, LeFroy plunged it into the cask and drank with a great smacking of lips. Then, refilling the cup, he passed it to Sotenah.

"See!" he cried, "it is a present from the *kloshe kloochman* to the people of MacNair! The people who are down-trodden and oppressed!" Under the spell of the man's words, all fear of the wrath of MacNair vanished, and Sotenah greedily seized the cup and drank, while about him crowded the others rendering the night hideous with their frenzied cries of exultation.

The cask was quickly emptied, and another broached. Old men, women, and children, all drank—and fighting, and leaping, and dancing, and yelling, returned

to drink again. For, never within the memory of the oldest, had any Indian drunk the white men's whisky for which he had not paid.

Darkness fell. Fires were lighted upon the beach, and the wild orgy continued. Other casks were opened, and the drink-crazed Indians yelled and fought and sang in a perfect frenzy of delirium. Firebrands were hurled high into the air, to fall whirling among the cabins. And it was these whirling brands that riveted the attention of the occupants of the big canoe that approached swiftly along the shore from the direction of the Yellow Knife. Lefroy had timed his work well. In the bow, Lapierre, with a grim smile upon his thin lips, watched the arcs of the whirling brands, while from their position amidship, Chloe and Big Lena stared fascinated upon the scene.

"What are they doing?" cried the girl in amazement. Lapierre turned and smiled into her eyes.

"We have come," he answered, "at a most opportune time. You are about to see MacNair's Indians at their worst. For they seem to be even more drunk than usual. It is MacNair's way—to make them drunk while he looks on and laughs."

"Do you mean," cried the girl in horror, "that—that they are drunk?"

Lapierre smiled. "Very drunk," he answered dryly. "It is the only way MacNair can hold them—by allowing them free license at frequent intervals. For well the Indians know that nowhere else in all the north would this thing be permitted. Therefore, they remain with MacNair."

The canoe had drawn close now, and the figures of the Indians were plainly discernible. Many were lying sprawled upon the ground, while others leaped and danced in the red flare of the flames. At frequent intervals, above the sound of the frenzied shouts and weird chants, arose the sharp rattle of shots, as the Indians fired recklessly into the air.

At a signal from Lapierre the canoe-men ceased paddling. Chloe's eyes

flashed an inquiry, and Lapierre shook his head.

"We can venture no closer," he explained. "At such times their deviltry knows no bounds. They would make short shrift of any one who would venture among them this night."

Chloe nodded. "I have no wish to go farther!" she cried. "I have seen enough, and more than enough! When this night's work shall become known in Ottawa, its echo shall ring from Labrador to the Yukon until throughout all Canada the name of MacNair shall be hated and despised!"

At the words Lapierre glanced into her flushed face and, removing his hat, bowed reverently. "God grant that your prophecy may be fulfilled. And I speak, not because of any hatred for MacNair, but from a heart overflowing with love and compassion for my people. For their welfare, it is my earnest prayer that this man's just punishment shall not long be delayed."

While he was yet speaking, from the midst of the turmoil red flames shot high into the air. The yelling increased ten-fold, and the frenzied horde surged toward the walls of the stockade. The cabins of the Indians were burning! Wider and higher flared the fire, and louder and fiercer swelled the sounds of yelling and the firing of rifles. The walls of the stockade ignited. The fire was eating its way toward the long, log storehouse. Instantly through the girl's mind flashed the memory of that other night when the sky glowed red, and the crash of rifles mingled with the hoarse roar of flames. She gazed in fascination as the fire licked and curled above the roof of the storehouse. Upon the shore even the canoes were burning.

Suddenly a wild shriek was borne to hear ears. The firing of guns ceased abruptly, and around the corner of the burning storehouse dashed a figure of terror, hatless and coatless, with long hair streaming wildly in the firelight. Tall, broad, and gaunt it appeared in the light

of the flaring flames, and instantly Chloe recognized the form of Bob MacNair. Lapierre also recognized it, and gasped audibly. For at that moment he knew MacNair should have been far across the barrens on the trail of the caribou herd.

"Look! Look!" cried the girl. "What is he doing?" And watched in horror as the big man charged among the Indians, smashing, driving, and kicking his way through the howling, rum-crazed horde. At every lashing blow of his fist, every kick of his high-laced boot, men went down. Others reeled drunkenly from his path, screaming aloud in their fright; while across the open space in the foreground four or five men could be seen dashing frantically for the protection of the timber. MacNair ripped the gun from the hand of a reeling Indian and, throwing it to his shoulder, fired. Of those who ran, one dropped, rose to his knees, and sank backward. MacNair fired again, and another crashed forward, and rolled over and over upon the ground.

Lapierre watched with breathless interest while the others gained the shelter of the timber. He wondered whether one of the two men who fell was Lefroy.

"Oh!" cried Chloe in horror. "He's killing them!"

Lapierre made a swift sign to his paddlers, and the canoe shot behind a low sand-point where, in response to a tense command, the canoe-men turned its bow southward; and, for the second time, Chloe Elliston found herself being driven by willing hands southward upon Snare Lake.

"He pounded—and kicked—and beat them!" sobbed the girl hysterically. "And two of them he killed!"

Lapierre nodded. "Yes," he answered sadly, "and he will kill more of them. It seems that this time they got beyond even his control. For the destruction of his buildings and his goods, he will take his toll in lives and in the sufferings of his Indians."

While the canoe shot southward through the darkness, Chloe sat huddled

upon her blankets. And as she watched the dull-red glow fade from the sky above MacNair's burning fort, her heart cried out for vengeance against this brute of the north.

One hour, two hours, the canoe plowed the black waters of the lake, and then, because men must rest, Lapierre reluctantly gave the order to camp, and the tired canoemen turned the bow shoreward.

Hardly had they taken a dozen strokes when the canoe ground sharply against the thin, shore ice. There was the sound of ripping bark, where the knifelike edge of the ice tore through the side of the frail craft. Water gushed in, and Lapierre, stifling a curse that rose to his lips, seized the paddle, and leaning over the bow began to chop frantically at the ice. Two of the canoemen with their paddles held her head on, while the other two, with the help of Chloe and Big Lena endeavored to stay the inrush of water with blankets and fragments of clothing.

Progress was slow. The ice thickened as they neared the shore, and Lapierre's paddle-blade, battered upon its point and edges to a soft, fibrous pulp, thudded softly upon the ice without breaking it. He threw the paddle overboard and seized another. A few more yards were won, but the shore loomed black and forbidding, and many yards away. Despite the utmost efforts of the women and the two canoemen, the water gained rapidly. Lapierre redoubled his exertion, chopping and stabbing at the ever thickening shore-ice. And then suddenly his paddle crashed through, and with a short cry of relief he rose to his feet, leaped into the black water, where he sank only to his middle. The canoemen followed. And the canoe, relieved of the bulk of its burden, floated more easily.

Slowly they pushed shoreward through the shallow water, the men breaking the ice before them. And a few minutes later, wet and chilled to the bone, they stepped onto the gravel.

Within the shelter of a small thicket a

fire was built, and while the men returned to examine the damaged canoe, the two women wrung out their dripping garments and, returning them wet, huddled close to the tiny blaze. The men returned to the fire, where a meal was prepared and eaten in silence. As he ate, Chloe noticed that Lapierre seemed ill at ease.

"Did you repair the canoe?" she asked. The man shook his head.

"No. It is damaged beyond any thought of repair. We removed the food and such of its contents as are necessary, and, loading it with rocks, sank it in the lake."

"Sank it in the lake!" cried the girl in amazement.

"Yes," answered Lapierre. "For even if it were not damaged, it would be of no further use to us. To-night the lake will freeze."

"What are we going to do?" cried the girl.

"There is only one thing to do," answered Lapierre quickly. "Walk to the school. It is not such a long trail—a hundred miles or so. And you can take it easy. You have plenty of provisions."

"I!" cried the girl. "And what will you do?"

"It is necessary," answered the man, "that I should make a forced march."

"You are going to leave me?"

Lapierre smiled at the evident note of alarm in her voice. "I am going to take two of the canoemen and return in all haste to your school. Do you realize that MacNair, now that he has lost his winter provisions, will stop at nothing to obtain more?"

"He would not dare!" cried the girl, her eyes flashing.

Lapierre laughed. "You do not know MacNair. You, personally, he would not venture to molest. He will doubtless try to buy supplies from you or from the Hudson Bay Company. But, in the mean time, while he is upon this errand his Indians, with no one to hold them in check, and knowing that the supplies are

in your storehouse, will swoop down upon it, and your own Indians, without a leader, will fall an easy prey to the hungry horde."

"But surely," cried the girl, "Lefroy is capable—"

"Possibly, if he were at the school," interrupted Lapierre. "But unfortunately the day before we ourselves departed, I sent Lefroy upon an important mission to the eastward. I think you will agree with me upon the importance of the mission when I tell you that, as I swung out of the mouth of Slave River at the head of the canoe brigade, I saw a fast canoe slipping stealthily along the shore to the westward. In that canoe, with the aid of my binoculars, I made out two men whom I have long suspected of being engaged in the nefarious and hellish business of peddling whisky among the Indians. I knew it was useless to try to overtake them with my heavily loaded canoe, and so upon my arrival at the school, as soon as we had concluded the outfitting of the trappers, I dispatched Lefroy to hunt these men down, to destroy any liquor found in their possession, and to deal with them as he saw fit."

He paused and gazed steadily into the girl's face. "This may seem to you a lawless and high-handed proceeding, Miss Elliston," he went on; "but you have just witnessed one exhibition of the tragedy that whisky can work among my people. In my opinion, the end justifies the means."

The girl regarded him with shining eyes. "Indeed it does!" she cried. "Oh, there is nothing—no punishment—too severe for such brutes, such devils, as these! I—I hope Lefroy will catch them. I hope—almost—he will kill them."

Lapierre nodded. "Yes, Miss Elliston," he answered gravely, "one could sometimes almost wish so, but I have forbidden it. The taking of a human life is a serious matter; and in the north the exigencies of the moment all too frequently make this imperative. As a last resort only should we kill."

"You are right," echoed the girl. "Only after the scene we have just witnessed, it seemed that I myself could kill deliberately, and be glad I killed. Truly the north breeds savagery. For I, too, have killed on the spur of the moment!" The words fell rapidly from her lips, and she cried out in physical pain. "And to think that I killed in defense of *him!* Oh, if I had let the Indian shoot that night, all this"—she waved her hand to the northward—"would never have happened."

"Very true, Miss Elliston," answered Lapierre softly. "But do not blame yourself. Under the circumstances, you could not have done otherwise."

As he talked, two of the canoe-men made up light packs from the outfit of the wrecked canoe. Seeing that they had concluded, Lapierre arose, and taking Chloe's hand in both of his, looked straight into her eyes.

"Good-by," he said simply. "These Indians will conduct you in safety to your school." And, without waiting for a reply, he turned and followed the two canoe-men into the brush.

Chloe sat for a long time staring into the flames of the tiny fire before creeping between her damp blankets. Despite the utter body-weariness of her long canoe-trip, the girl slept but fitfully in her cold bed.

In the early gray of the morning she started up nervously. Surely a sound had awakened her. She heard it distinctly now, the sound of approaching footsteps. She strained to locate the sound, and instantly she realized it was not the tread of moccasined feet. She threw off the frost-stiffened blankets and leaped to her feet, shivering in the keen air of the biting dawn.

The sounds of the footsteps grew louder, plainer, as though some one had turned suddenly from the shore and approached the thicket with long, heavy strides. With muscles tense and heart bounding wildly the girl waited. Then, scarce ten feet from her side, the thick scrub parted with a vicious swish, and a man, hatless, glar-

ing, and white-faced, stood before her. The man was MacNair.

CHAPTER XV.

"ARREST THAT MAN!"

SECONDS passed—tense, portentous seconds—as the two stood facing each other over the dead ashes of the little fire. Seconds in which the white, drawn features of the man engraved themselves indelibly upon Chloe Elliston's brain. She noted the knotted muscles of the clenched hands and the glare of the sunken eyes. Noted, also, the cringing, fear-stricken forms of the two Indians, who had awakened and lay cowering upon their blankets. And Big Lena, whose pale-blue, fishlike eyes stared first at one and then at the other from out a face absolutely devoid of expression.

Suddenly a fierce, consuming anger welled into the girl's heart, and words fell from her lips in a veritable hiss of scorn: "Have you come to kill me, too?"

"By God, it would be a good thing for the north if I should kill you!"

"A good thing for MacNair, you mean!" taunted the girl. "Yes, I think it would. Well, there is nothing to hinder you. Of course, you would have to kill these, also." She indicated Big Lena and the Indians. "But what are mere lives to you?"

"They are nothing to me when the fate of my people is at stake! And at this very moment their fate—their whole future—the future of their children and their children's children—is at stake, as it has never been at stake before. Many times in my life have I faced crises; but never such a crisis as this. And always I have won, regardless of cost—but the cost only I have ever known."

His eyes glared, and he seemed a madman in his berserk rage. He drove a huge fist into his upturned palm and fairly shouted his words: "I am MacNair! And if there is a God in heaven, I will win! From this moment it is my life or

Lapierre's! Since last night's outrage there can be no truce—no quibbling—no parleying—no half-way measures! My friends are my friends, and his friends are my enemies! The war is on—and it will be a fight to the finish. A fight that may well disrupt the north!" He shook his clenched fist before the face of the girl. "I have taken the man-trail! I am MacNair! And at the end of that trail will lie a dead man—myself or Pierre Lapierre!"

"And at the beginning of the trail lie two dead men," sneered Chloe. "Those who started for the timber—"

"And, by God, if necessary, the trail will be paved with dead men! For Lapierre, the day of reckoning is at hand."

Chloe took a step forward, and with blazing eyes stood trembling with anger before the man. "And how about *your own* day of reckoning? You have told me that I am a fool; but it is you who are the fool! You killer of helpless men! You debaucher of women and children! You trader in souls! As you say, the day of reckoning is at hand—not for Lapierre, but for *you!* Until this day you have not taken me seriously. I have been a fool—a blind, trusting fool. You have succeeded, in spite of what I have heard—in spite of my better judgment—in spite even of what I have seen, in making me believe that, possibly, you had been misunderstood; had been painted blacker than you really are. At times I almost believed in you; but I have since learned enough from the mouths of your own Indians to convince me of my folly. And after what I saw last night—" She paused in very horror of the thought, and MacNair glared into her outraged eyes.

"You saw that? You stood by and witnessed the ruination of my Indians? Deliberately watched them changed from sober, industrious, simple-hearted children of the wild into a howling, drink-crazed horde of beasts that thirsted for blood—tore at each other's throats—and, in the frenzy of their madness, burned their own homes, and their winter's supplies

and provisions? You stood by and saw them glutted with the whisky from your storehouse—by your own paid creatures—”

“ Whisky from my storehouse!” The girl’s voice rose to a scream, and MacNair interrupted her savagely:

“ Aye, whisky from your storehouse! Brought in by Lapierre, and by Lapierre cunningly and freely given out to my Indians.”

“ You are crazy! You are mad! You do not know what you are saying? But if you *do* know, you are the most consummate liar on the face of the earth! Of all things absurd! Is it possible that you hope by any such preposterous and flimsy fabrication to escape the punishment which will surely and swiftly be meted out to you? Will you tell that to the Mounted? And will you tell it to the judge and the jury? What will they say when I have told my story, and have had it corroborated by your own Indians—those Indians who have fled to my school to seek a haven of refuge from your tyranny? I have my manifest. My goods were inspected and passed by the Mounted—”

“ Inspected and passed! And why? Because they were *your* goods, and the men of the Mounted have yet to suspect you. The inspection was perfunctorily made. And as for the manifest—I did not say it was your whisky. I said, ‘whisky from your storehouse.’ It was Lapierre’s whisky. And he succeeded in running it in by the boldest, and at the same time the cleverest and safest method—disguised as your freight. Tell me this: Did you check your pieces upon their arrival at your storehouse?”

“ No; Lapierre did that, or Lefroy.”

“ And Lapierre, having first ascertained that I was far on the caribou trail, succeeded in slipping the whisky to my Indians, but he—”

“ Mr. Lapierre was with me! Accuse him and you accuse me, also. He brought me here because I wished to see for myself the condition of your Indians

—the condition of which I had so often heard.”

“ Was Lefroy, also, with you?”

“ Lefroy was away upon a mission, and that mission was to capture two others of your ilk—two whisky-runners!”

MacNair laughed harshly. “ Good Lefroy!” he exclaimed in derision. “ Great God, you are a fool! You yourself saw Lefroy and his satellites rushing wildly for the shelter of the timber, when I unexpectedly appeared among them.” The light of exultation leaped into his eyes. “ I killed two of them, but Lefroy escaped. Lapierre timed his work well. And had it not been that one of my Indians, who was a spy in Lapierre’s camp, learned of his plan and followed me across the barrens, Lapierre would have had ample time, after the destruction of my fort, to have scattered my Indians to the four winds. When I learned of his plot I forced the trail as I never had forced a trail, in the hope of arriving in time to prevent the catastrophe. I reached the fort too late to save my Indians from your human wolf-pack, their homes from the flames, and my buildings and my property from destruction. But, thank God, it is not too late to wreck my vengeance upon the enemies of my people! For the trail is hot, and I will follow it, if need be, to the end of the earth.”

“ Your love for your Indians is, indeed, touching. I witnessed a demonstration of that love last night, when you battered and kicked and hurled them about in their drunken and helpless condition. But, tell me, what will become of them while you are following your trail of blood—the trail you so fondly imagine will terminate in the death of Lapierre, but which will, as surely and inevitably as justice itself, lead you to a prison cell, if not the gallows?”

MacNair regarded the girl almost fiercely. “ I must leave my Indians,” he answered, “ for the present, to their own devices. For the simple reason that I cannot be in two places at one time.”

"But their supplies were burned! They will starve!" cried the girl. "It would seem that one who really loved his Indians would have his first thought for their welfare. But no; you prefer to take the trail and kill men; men who may at some future time tell their story upon the witness-stand; a story that will not sound pretty in the telling, and that will mark the crash of your reign of tyranny. 'Safety first' is your slogan, and your Indians may starve while you murder men." The girl paused and suddenly became conscious that MacNair was regarding her with a strange look in his eyes. And at his next words she could scarcely believe her ears.

"Will you care for my Indians?"

The question staggered her. "What!" she managed to gasp.

"Just what I said," answered MacNair gruffly. "Will you care for my Indians until such time as I shall return to them—until I have ridded the north of Lapierre?"

"Do you mean," cried the astonished girl, "will I care for your Indians—the same Indians who attacked my school—who only last night fought like fiends among themselves, and burned their own homes?"

"Just that!" answered MacNair. "The Indian who warned me of Lapierre's plot told me, also, of the arrival of your supplies—sufficient, he said, to feed the whole north. You will not lose by it. Name your own price, and I shall pay whatever you ask."

"Price!" flashed the girl. "Do you think I would take your gold—the gold that has been wrung from the hearts' blood of your Indians?"

"On your own terms, then," answered MacNair. "Will you take them? Surely this arrangement should be to your liking. Did you not tell me yourself, upon the occasion of our first meeting, that you intended to use every means in your power to induce my Indians to attend your school? That you would teach them that they are free? That they owe

allegiance and servitude to no man? That you would educate, and show them they were being robbed and cheated and forced into serfdom? That you intended to appeal to their better natures, to their manhood and womanhood? I think those were your words. Did you not say that? And did you mean it? Or was it the idle boast of an angry woman?"

Chloe interrupted him. "Yes, I said that, and I meant it! And I mean it now!"

"You have your chance," growled MacNair. "I impose no restrictions. I shall command them to obey you; even to attend your school, if you wish! You will hardly have time to do them much harm. As I told you, the north is not ready for your education. But I know that you are honest. You are a fool, and the time is not far distant when you yourself will realize this; when you will learn that you have become the unwitting dupe of one of the shrewdest and most diabolical scoundrels that ever drew breath. Again I tell you that some day you and I shall be friends! At this moment you hate me. But I know it is through ignorance you hate. I have small patience with your ignorance; but, also, at this moment you are the only person in all the north with whom I would trust my Indians. Lapierre, from now on, will be past harming them. I shall see to it that he is kept so busy in the matter of saving his own hide that he will have scant time for deviltry."

Still Chloe appeared to hesitate. And through MacNair's mind flashed the memory of the rapier-blade eyes that stared from out the dull gold frame of the portrait that hung upon the wall of the little cottage—eyes that were the eyes of the girl before him.

"Well," he asked with evident impatience, "are you *afraid* of these Indians?"

The flashing eyes of the girl told him that the shot had struck home. "No!" she cried. "I am not afraid! Send your Indians to me, if you will; and when you

send them, bid good-by to them forever."

MacNair nodded. "I will send them," he answered, and, turning abruptly upon his heel, disappeared into the scrub.

The journey down the Yellow Knife consumed six days, and it was a journey fraught with many hardships for Chloe Elliston, unaccustomed as she was to trail travel. The little-used trail, following closely the bank of the stream, climbed low, rock-ribbed ridges, traversed black spruce swamps, and threaded endlessly in and out of the scrub timber. Nevertheless, the girl held doggedly to the slow pace set by the canoeemen.

When at last, foot-sore and weary, with nerves a jangle, and with every muscle in her body protesting with its own devilishly ingenious ache against the overstrain of the long, rough miles and the chill misery of damp blankets, she arrived at the school, Lapierre was nowhere to be found. For the wily quarter-breed, knowing that MacNair would instantly suspect the source of the whisky, had, upon his arrival, removed the remaining casks from the storehouse, and conveyed them with all haste to his stronghold on Lac du Mort.

Upon her table in the cottage Chloe found a brief note to the effect that Lapierre had been forced to hasten to the eastward to aid Lefroy in dealing with the whisky-runners. The girl had scant time to think of Lapierre, however, for upon the morning after her arrival MacNair appeared, accompanied by a hundred or more dejected and wobegone Indians. Despite the fact that Chloe had known them only as fierce roisterers, she was forced to admit that they looked harmless and peaceful enough, under the chastening effect of a week of starvation.

MacNair wasted no time, but striding up to Chloe, who stood upon the veranda of her cottage, plunged unceremoniously into the business at hand.

"Do not misunderstand me," he began gruffly. "I did not bring my Indians

here to receive the benefits of your education, nor as a sop to your anger, nor for any other reason than to procure for them food and shelter until such time as I myself can provide for them. If they were trappers this would be unnecessary. But they have long since abandoned the trap-lines, and in the whole village there could not be found enough traps to supply one-tenth of their number with the actual necessities of life. I have sent runners to the young men upon the barren grounds, with orders to continue the caribou kill and bring the meat to you here. I have given my Indians their instructions. They will cause you no trouble, and will be subject absolutely to your commands. And now, I must be on my way. I must pick up the trail of Lapierre. And when I return I shall confront you with evidence that will prove to you beyond a doubt that the words I have spoken are true!"

"And I will confront you," retorted the girl, "with evidence that will place you behind prison bars for the rest of your life!" Again Chloe saw in the gray eyes the twinkle that held more than the suspicion of a smile.

"I think I would make but a poor prisoner," the man answered. "But if I am to be a prisoner I warn you that I will run the prison. I am MacNair!" Something in the man's look—he was gazing straight into her eyes with a peculiar intense gaze—caused the girl to start, while a sudden indescribable feeling of fear, of helplessness before this man, flashed over her. The feeling passed in an instant, and she sneered boldly into MacNair's face.

"My, how you hate yourself!" she cried. "And how long is it, Mr. Brute MacNair—" was it fancy, or did the man wince at the emphasis of the name? She repeated, with added emphasis, "Mr. Brute MacNair, since you have deemed it worth your while to furnish me with evidence? You told me once, I believe, that you cared nothing for my opinion. Is it possible that you hope

at this late day to flatter me with my own importance?"

MacNair, in no wise perturbed, regarded her gravely. "No," he answered. "It is not that, it is—" He paused as if at a loss for words. "I do not know why," he continued, "unless, perhaps, it is because—because you have no fear of me. That you do not fear to take your life into your hands in defense of what you think is right. It may be that I have learned a certain respect for you. Certainly I do not pity you. At times you have made me very angry with your foolish blundering, until I remember it is honest blundering, and that some day you will know the north, and will know that north of sixty men are not measured by your little rule of thumb. Always I have gone my way, caring no more for the approval of others than I have for their hatred or scoffing. I know the north! Why should I care for the opinion of others? If they do not know, so much the worse for them. The reputation of being a fool injures no one. Had I not been thought a fool by the men of the Hudson Bay Company they would not have sold me the barren grounds whose sands are loaded with gold."

"And yet you said *I* was a fool," interrupted Chloe. "According to your theory that fact should redound to my credit."

MacNair answered without the suspicion of a smile.

"I did not say that *being* a fool injured no one. You *are* a fool. Of your reputation I know nothing, nor care." He turned abruptly on his heel, walked to the storehouse, leaving the girl, speechless with anger, standing upon the veranda of the cottage, as she watched his swinging shoulders disappear from sight around the corner of the log building.

With flushed face Chloe turned toward the river, and instantly her attention centered upon the figure of a man, who swung out of the timber and approached across the clearing in long, easy strides.

She regarded the man closely. Certainly he was no one she had ever seen before. He was very near now, and at the distance of a few feet, paused and bowed, as he swept the Stetson from his head. The girl's heart gave a wild bound of joy. The man wore the uniform of the Mounted!

"Miss Elliston?" he asked.

"Yes," answered Chloe, as her glance noted the clear-cut, almost boyish lines of the weather-bronzed face.

"I am Corporal Ripley, ma'am, at your service. I happened on a Fort Rae Injun—a Dog Rib, a few days since, and he told me some kind of a yarn about a band of Yellow Knives that had attacked your post some time during the summer. I couldn't get much out of him because he could speak only a few words of English, and I can't speak any Dog Rib. Besides, you can't go much on what an Indian tells you. When you come to sift down their dope it generally turns out to be nine parts lies and the other part divided between truth, superstition, and guess-work. Constable Darling, at Fort Resolution, said he'd received no complaint, so I didn't hurry through."

With a swift glance toward the storehouse, into which MacNair had disappeared, Chloe motioned the man into the cottage. "The—the attack was nothing," she hastened to assure him. "But there is something—a complaint that I wish to make against a man who is, and has been for years, doing all in his power to debauch and brutalize the Indians of the north." The girl paced nervously up and down as she spoke, and she noted that the youthful officer leaned forward expectantly, his wide boyish eyes narrowed to slits.

"Yes," he urged eagerly, "who is this man? And have you got the evidence to back your charge? For I take it from your words you intend to make a charge."

"Yes," answered Chloe. "I do intend to make a charge, and I have my

evidence. The man is MacNair. Brute MacNair he is called—”

“ What! MacNair of Slave Lake—Bob MacNair of the barren grounds!”

“ Yes, Bob MacNair of the barren grounds.” A moment of silence followed her words. A silence during which the officer’s face assumed a troubled expression.

“ You are sure there is no mistake?” he asked at length.

“ There is no mistake!” flashed the

girl. “ With my own eyes I have seen enough to convict a dozen men!”

Even as she spoke, a form passed the window, and a heavy tread sounded on the veranda. Stepping quickly to the door, Chloe flung it open, and pointing toward MacNair, who stood, rifle in hand, cried: “ Officer, arrest that man!”

Corporal Ripley, who had risen to his feet, stood gazing from one to the other; while MacNair, speechless, stared straight into the eyes of the girl.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK. Don’t forget this magazine is issued weekly, and that you will get the continuation of this story without waiting a month.

Peon of the Snows.

by Chart Pitt

A THOUSAND jumbled street noises came in through the open window of the Hudson Bay fur-house, where Rod Selkirk was bending over the sorting-table.

It was not the din of a city’s traffic that the sorter heard as his fingers lingered upon an unusually fine marten-skin. His heart leaped to the sound of wilderness voices; the low humming of the northern pines, and the silver tinkle of a mountain brook. It was the far challenge of the unmapped lands, that called and called, and refused to be still.

Lovingly he caressed the wonderful skin that had awakened that flood of memories. Then his hand paused in the middle of the stroke.

The unmistakable crackle of paper came to him over the soft whisper of the trembling fur.

Methodically his fingers searched within the marten-skin, and brought out the crumpled page of a magazine. Thoughtfully he placed it upon the table and smoothed out its wrinkled surface.

Then the languid unconcern that was born of a homesick longing was suddenly swept away. White-lipped and trembling he read the written words that glared up at him from the margin of the page.

For God’s sake come and save me!

TOM LARKIN.

One terrible moment Rod Selkirk held the message in his trembling fingers,

fighting off the horror that suddenly had pounced down upon him. For Tom Larkin was *dead!*

Rod Selkirk had ranged the northern wilderness for ten years in company with that matchless old hunter, whose heart was as big and unmapped as the lonely lands that he loved.

At last they had blundered upon an untrapped valley on the far head-waters of the Pelly River, and made a fortune in one winter.

They had agreed never to go back to the old life. Rod had found it a losing battle, fighting against that subtle lure of the north, and had compromised by going to work for the Hudson Bay Fur Company at Seattle, where he might handle the skins that came out of the wilderness which he never could forget.

But Tom Larkin had followed the fur-trails too many years. He sniffed the first autumn wind that blew out of the north—and broke his promise.

With a homesick longing for the lonely lakes and dog-toothed crags of his beloved wilderness, he had hired out to the Hudson Bay people, and turned his face toward the Pelly.

De Friers, at the Pelly River post, sent word down that the old hunter had been caught in a fierce blizzard. An Indian had found him frozen among the drifts.

Yes, Tom Larkin was dead, and the northland had lost something it never could replace. A thousand times the old hero had faced death that weaker men might live. Yet it was the wilderness that had claimed him in the end. He was lost, but never would be forgotten while men followed a dim trail through the blinding smother of the storm. Every wind that blew out of the north seemed to Rod Selkirk to hold something of the old man's presence, as though his soul still wandered upon the hills.

Yet there was the scrap of paper bearing the old man's unmistakable scrawl. Could it be that—somewhere in the trackless north, Tom Larkin lived—and suffered?

However, there was little to point the way. The paper bore neither date nor address. It had every appearance of having been dashed off in haste.

The marten-skin which had served as a hiding-place for the message might have come from any one of a hundred creeks where some independent Indian had a trap-line, and sold his furs through the Pelly River post. Or it might have come direct from the Wolf Cañon country, where De Friers was master of the wilderness miles.

But if Tom Larkin still lived, why had De Friers sent out that message about the man who was found dead among the drifts?

It was too detailed a report to have been a case of mistaken identity; and no message had come from Tom since he left tidewater at Skagway.

The thought gave Rod a cold chill, as if some hidden thing menaced him across the miles. But only for a moment did the fur-sorter allow that unspoken fear to stand like a phantom barrier across the northern trail. The conviction grew that Tom Larkin lived, and waited for his coming.

That was enough. Among the multitude of men who owed a debt of gratitude to the old hunter, none had looked upon his naked soul as had Rod Selkirk; and upon no other did the obligations of brotherhood fall so heavily.

The fur-sorter tucked the paper in his pocket and started for the office. At first he had intended to show the paper to McMasters, who was in charge of the Seattle branch. Upon second thought he decided that it would be foolish to expose his hand now.

He knew he was pitted against some hidden power. It had been no trifling thing that had caused the resourceful old warrior to send out that pitiful appeal for help.

The face of Rod Selkirk had assumed a bored expression when he slipped into the private office of McMasters. He purposefully left the door ajar behind him.

"I can't stand it any longer—I got to get back to the wilderness for a while," the fur-sorcer complained petulantly. "This rustle and roar will drive me mad if I stay another day. I'm going to the Barren Grounds or to the tundra-country back of Point Barrow—I got to get a little room to breathe."

"You fellows from the wilds are a queer race of ginks," McMasters smiled. "But we need you in the business. If you ever get tired of wandering, just report to the nearest Hudson Bay post and go to work. There always is room for a man like you with the company."

Rod gripped the extended hand of the manager, and walked out of the room.

"You wasn't thinking of going back to the old stamping-ground, was you Selkirk?"

The voice at his elbow startled the fur-sorcer. He turned and looked into the cold, calculating eyes of Louie Raus, the assistant manager.

Raus never had tried to hide his hatred for Selkirk. He had been at the Pelly River post when the two hunters brought their boat-load of choice marten-skins down from that untrapped valley upon the far head-waters of the stream. Raus had pleaded excitedly, and De Friers had blustered when they saw that cargo of matchless furs slipping through their fingers. But in the end Rod had sold the skins to the Hudson Bay people in Seattle.

That cargo of fur had put Rod and Tom in solid with McMasters and the rest. Yet the hatred only deepened in the gray-green eyes of Raus when he heard of it.

This was the first pleasant word the assistant manager had spoken to the sorcer since he came to work for them. So Rod answered him cheerfully:

"I hadn't thought of it—why?"

"Oh, nothing, only I had some orders going out to De Friers, and thought I might send them along—but no matter—it wasn't anything important."

As Rod Selkirk turned away he had

the uncomfortable sensation that those gray-green eyes of Raus were looking through him as if he had been made of glass; that even the message from Tom Larkin which he had hidden in his pocket was not safe from the prying assistant manager.

Once more he sensed an intangible danger that hovered over him like a dead man's curse. He quickened his steps toward his boarding-house in the hope of shaking off the morbid impression. But it followed him through the jostling streets of Seattle, a sinister hate that dogged his footsteps, but refused to come out into the open and fight, as the honor-code of the wilderness demanded.

Yet through the shadow of this nameless danger, which only the soul of the hunter sensed as yet, there was the ringing call of the northland. Now there was a satisfied note in the far voice, like the lazy droning of wind among the spruces. It seemed to him that the wise old wilderness knew that soon it would once more hear the sound of Rod Selkirk's feet along the lonely trails.

Then the voice changed, and it seemed to be a greedy gloating that drifted in on the north wind; something that stamped and raged among those homeless solitudes as it waited for the coming of its prey.

II.

MORE than once Rod Selkirk had made preparations for a thousand-mile journey between the dark and the dawn. So now he gathered up his camp-kit and was aboard a north-bound steamer before most men would have finished reading the time-tables. Less than two hours had elapsed since Rod had heard that call for help, and already he was coming to the relief of his friend as fast as steam could carry him.

There was nothing in the make-up of Rod Selkirk that should have made him a marked man among that crowd of miners and prospectors who were heading back to the wilderness. His garments

were of a kind that had won general approval among the hardy souls who people that last frontier up under the flicker of the northern lights. His face bore the indelible traces of arctic winds, and his gait had been schooled to perfection upon hard trails.

Any man of the north would have called him "old timer," and let it go at that.

But Seattle was still in sight astern when a pious-faced man in black picked Rod out of the crowd to make a confidant of him.

"Brother, tell me of your north. What will I find there?" The stranger laid a hand upon Rod's shoulder. "You are a wonderful race of men, you fellows who live among the snows. But silent—believe me, brother, you are the first man on the ship who hasn't backed away from me and whispered 'sky-pilot' to his friends."

"I suppose they don't want to talk along your line," Selkirk ventured. "They don't keep read up on such things—and are ashamed to show their ignorance."

"It isn't that." The stranger lowered his voice. "I wanted them to tell me about the north—to show me the ways of the land, so I wouldn't go wrong. I had given up in despair when I happened to see you. I knew at a glance that I had found a man who would show me the ways of the country."

"You made a mistake that time, parson," Rod laughed. "You'll have to wish yourself on one of those miners. They know where they are going, and when they get there they'll stop. I may keep a going till I hit the pole."

"A most remarkable man, most remarkable," the parson flattered. "Just like your wild, free country. To know you is to know the north. It is fortunate that we both have a roving commission, and each has a touch of the wanderlust in his soul. We are going to get on famously together, as soon as we take to the trail."

"There won't be any trail where I'm going," Rod attempted to shake off the unwelcome guest. "I have been down in the States spending my money. I have got enough of civilization to last me a long while. You can bet I won't let the grass grow under my feet as soon as I get ashore. I wouldn't dare take you along—you couldn't keep up with me. I'd have to leave you for the wolves."

"Don't be so sure about that!" There was a thrill of pride in the parson's voice. "I used to be the champion cross-country walker in the Tacoma Y. M. C. A."

Rod didn't try to argue it out with the man who wanted to be his trail-mate. He avoided him.

Selkirk was the first passenger ashore at Skagway. Once he caught a glimpse of the parson on the street and dodged around a corner.

Rod hurried aboard the waiting train and began the hard climb to Whitehorse. He had everything in readiness, and as soon as he stepped from the cars he plunged into the wilderness, following an old, abandoned Indian trail that struck across country to the upper Pelly, one hundred and fifty miles as the crow flies.

There was a song in the heart of the man who had grown weary of the bustle of the town. The soft wind that fluttered among the tree-tops was like the voice of an old friend speaking to him. As eager as a schoolboy he pressed forward till the gathering darkness shut out the trail and forced him to camp.

He sat beside his leaping fire and listened to the voices of the wilderness night. The spicy perfume of the northern spruces was like wine in Rod Selkirk's blood. He ate his simple supper with a keener relish than he ever had felt over a feast back there in the town.

The satisfaction of that first camp out there under the fragrant spruces was in a measure broken by the memory of Tom Larkin. There was something missing from the picture. No friendly face smiled at him across the leaping blaze.

The big-hearted old hunter who always had shared his camp was caught in the tentacles of some mysterious power that hung like a curse above the northern hills.

Once more Rod seemed to sense the nearness of danger, and his hearing was sharpened for any unusual sound.

For an hour the night deepened about him. The wilderness voices grew more confident and unafraid out in the swamp. Then over the soft sighing of the spruces the man beside the fire heard something that sent the blood leaping in his veins.

It was the measured tread of human feet upon the mossy trail!

Rod moved back into the shadows and waited.

A moment later the hard-walking parson came stamping into the firelight.

"This is worse than anything I ever experienced with the Y. M. C. A.," he wheezed as he threw his pack down beside the fire.

"Forget about that Y. M. C. A. business," Selkirk snapped. "You are trail-wise—and then some. Just how you happened to get tangled up with trouble down there in the States is none of my business. Any man who has known the north as you have known it, and then tries to live on the *outside*—well, he has my sympathy."

"Sure thing—that parson stunt was for the benefit of the crowd," the stranger laughed. "I didn't expect you to believe it—not after we got out of sight of the rail-head."

"Well, here's luck to you, old timer—but remember I'm traveling alone." Rod handed the parson a cup of steaming coffee from the fire. "Now, don't get it into your head that I've got a rich strike back in the country here because I am so anxious to shake you loose. I have heard enough talk in the past year to last me the rest of my life. I want a chance to stretch out beside the fire and just smoke and think, without having some mouthy guy trying to horn in with a fool argument. It's peace and quiet I want—and I'm willing to fight to get them."

"I'm dog-tired." The stranger deliberately ignored the issue Rod had raised. "I'm going to turn in."

The next morning the parson awkwardly crawled from his sleeping-bag. There was a troubled look in his eyes.

"I was softer than I thought—and tried to do too much yesterday," he admitted wofully. "I'll have to stay in camp to-day."

That suited Rod exactly. He hurriedly ate his breakfast and swung his pack to his shoulders.

"So-long, parson," Selkirk offered his hand.

"So-long, old timer. If we ever meet up there, just forget that you ever saw me before—will you?"

"Sure thing," Rod agreed as he started down the trail. In his heart he sympathized with the man behind. His own muscles ached, and his joints fairly snapped at every step. As soon as he was out of sight he dropped into an easier gait.

He knew this would be the worst day of the trip. After that he would be able to cover his usual thirty miles.

III.

THE days that followed were as drab and uneventful as the lonely swamps through which he was journeying. The soft moss underfoot gave no sound as he passed. Like a silent ghost he drifted through the wilderness, where only a narrow speck of sky showed through the swaying branches, and the spruce-gloom hung deep and unbroken over the homeless swamps.

At dawn he was up and away, and when night swooped down upon him he built his camp. There would be an hour of beautiful dreams beside the leaping fire, before the trail-blight drove him to his blankets.

Six days out from Whitehorse the Indian trail joined the well-beaten portage road of Wolf Cañon. An hour later the

buildings of the Pelly River post showed up through the afternoon haze.

Rod Selkirk hurried up to the post. He intended to pass for a prospector, and had no fear of being recognized. That time when he came down the river with a cargo of marten-skins he had bristled with a six month's growth of hair and beard. Now he was freshly shaved and shorn, and felt that his identity was safely hidden.

As he drew near he noticed that a new building had been added to the settlement, a little block-house perched upon the edge of the river-bank.

When he stepped around the corner of the company store, Selkirk nearly dropped in his tracks.

The parson was seated in front of the building puffing at a fat cigar.

Rod passed him without a word. Not because of his promise, but because of a sudden resentment at the dogged persistency of the man.

He hadn't an idea what kind of game the pious fraud was playing; but the farsighted couldn't shake off the feeling that this man who wouldn't take no for an answer would in some way get tangled up in the web of intrigue from which Tom Lar-kin had found it impossible to escape.

De Friers himself was tending the store. With deliberate care he marked the page and paragraph in the cheap novel he was reading; then he faced his customer across the greasy counter.

"How many prospectors were operating up-stream this summer?" Rod ventured, as he took out his moose-hide wallet.

"About a dozen—but they all went down last week." The man behind the counter loosened the collar about his thick neck. His small eyes gleamed like those of a trapped weasel. Yet there was a trace of a smile beneath his unkempt beard.

"Any of the fellows strike pay dirt?"

"Don't think so." The man who ruled the Wolf Cañon country looked his visitor over from top to toe.

"Give me a half-pound of black tea." The pretended prospector walked over to the door and looked anxiously at a bank of soft gray clouds that were beginning to show above the spruce-tops to the northeast.

As soon as the package was on the counter Rod stowed it in his pocket, threw down a half-dollar and walked out of the store.

There was something in the eyes of De Friers that put Selkirk upon his guard. If the swarthy giant had failed to recognize his new customer, he was trying hard to remember.

The trapper looked about him for a suitable place to camp. He held up a moistened finger to catch the direction of the breeze. It came out of the northeast.

Rod moved up-stream. He didn't want to spend a night down-wind from the Indian village. He knew that the first catch of mink were coming in to the post, and they would be thickly covered with fat. It always fell to the lot of the native women to scrape away this musky grease before drying the skins, and their huts would smell to the high heavens as soon as the wind freshened.

Night swooped down upon the homeless forest, and something in the abysmal loneliness of the surroundings crept into the heart of the trapper as he crouched above his speck of flame.

Caution prompted him to move well back from the fire, and stretch his sleeping-bag in a clump of young spruces. Nothing would be able to prowl among those sharp-spined shrubs without awaking him.

Some time in the night he was roused by the wailing of a gale among the spruce-tops. Rod sniffed the air in disgust. The fetid odor of mink-grease filled the night. The wind must have changed while he slept.

Then his sharp eyes caught a faint flicker in the dark, where the gale had uncovered an ember among the ashes of his camp-fire. That speck of fire gave him his bearings. Rod Selkirk sat up

with a start. The wind had not changed. *The smell of mink-grease was coming down the river!*

The trapper had spent years in the pathless wilderness, and knew that life always hung by a hair. Often the correct reading of a footprint in the snow, or the far call of a bird in the night, had saved him from disaster. It was upon such trifles that he had learned to lean. That one secret had enabled him to fight famine and flood, and yet live.

There was a reason for that mink-odor coming from the direction of the block-house instead of the Indian camp. It was a part of Rod Selkirk's creed to know *why*.

He was pitting his wits against the cunning of the wild—against something that crouched in the gloom of the northern spruces, and refused to come out into the open to fight.

Now, if ever, he must rely upon his natural cunning for safety.

IV.

LIKE an animal of the wilderness, Rod Selkirk crawled from his lair and followed up-wind through the night.

The soft rustle of spruce-needles against his clothing ceased. He was out into the clearing at last. He could hear the eery calling of the wind as it sucked around the eaves of a building. A moment later the block-house rose up before him out of the night-gloom.

The acrid smell of mink-grease hung like a curse about the little structure. In a lull of the gale Rod heard the rattle of a chain from within.

"A fur-house, I guess, and they have got a dog watching it," he grumbled to himself.

The man outside was already turning away when he heard a human voice—a broken, babbling voice as mad as the mirthless laugh of a loon upon some night-bound northern lake.

Cautiously Rod groped his way to the window and peeped through the bars.

The stygian blackness within mocked even the sharp eyes of the hunter. He fished a flash-light from his pocket, determined to know the meaning of the strange combination of sounds that came from beyond the guarded window.

Then with a gasp he dropped the electric device back into its hiding-place. The gale had whipped a hole in the heavy clouds, and the blinding white moonlight flashed across the black forests like the sudden glare of lightning in the night. That ghastly light poured through the little window, and fell in a checkered pattern upon the opposite side of the room.

With horror-stricken eyes Rod Selkirk clung to the bars of that northern prison, and stared at the thing which moved about in the patch of moonlight.

It was the pitiful wreckage of what once had been a mighty hunter—*Tom Larkin, chained like a dog to the wall.*

The fire of madness glared in his sunken eyes, and his wasted face bore the red welts of a dog-whip above his tangled beard.

The clouds scurried over the face of the moon, and once more the northern wilderness was steeped in the murk of the night.

With the lust of battle burning in his heart, Rod Selkirk flung himself against the locked door. It refused to yield an inch. Regardless of consequences he drew his hunting-ax and attacked it savagely.

With the strength of a maniac he tore aside the last splinter that stood between him and his friend, and plunged into the room.

For a moment he fumbled with his flash-light. Then the glare of a suddenly uncovered lantern behind him flooded the interior of the prison with its yellow glow.

Rod Selkirk turned with uplifted ax, determined to fight to the death in defense of the old man whose life had been one endless battle, that weaker men might live.

The fur-sorcer was half-blinded by the sudden light in his eyes. Before he could

discover anything against which to launch his attack a cudgel came whizzing through the air toward him.

He tried to dodge the treacherous weapon, but he was a fraction of a second too slow, and the heavy club crashed against his head.

He felt the thud as the wood came in contact with his skull, and a multitude of horrible sounds were loosened within his brain.

Then a smothering blackness surged up about him—a blackness that was shot full with a thousand blood-red lights.

When Rod Selkirk recovered his senses the glow of a lantern shone over him. The smell of tobacco smoke had partly deadened the stench of the mink-fat.

"I guess you had reason for wanting to travel alone," a sarcastic, familiar voice greeted him from across the room.

For a moment Rod blinked at the light, trying to make out the face of the man in the shadows beyond. Then he saw.

"You—you hound of hell," the trapper choked. Like a panther he sprang at the parson.

His body was in mid air when something tugged at him from behind, and he fell face downward upon the floor.

He, too, was chained to the wall.

Carefully Rod slipped his hand to his hip. His weapons were gone.

De Friers and the parson moved closer—just beyond the reach of his chain. The new prisoner glared at them in silence.

"When you get ready to tell us where you caught that bunch of marten, I'll let you and the old man go," the boss of Wolf Cañon gloated.

"I'll see you dead and rotten first," Rod defied them. "I wouldn't tell if you killed me."

"That's what Tom said," the parson sneered. "He was wise to the fact that they couldn't afford to kill him—a dead man can't show you the way to a good trapping-ground. But now it is different. We don't need the old boy since we got you. He's getting sort of nutty—and makes trouble."

"How did *you* come in on this, you cheap skate?" Rod flared at him.

"Same as you did—butted in. If you'd stayed out of the game I'd be down there in Seattle now, living off the fat of the land. But I'm going back—and I'll think of you sometimes when the wind is out of the north—and I get a whiff of the mink-grease."

"We'll give him a day to think it over," De Friers suggested as they started to go. "Let him see how he likes the life. We'll come back to-morrow night and settle things."

Once more the room was in darkness. Rod lay upon the dirt floor and listened to his jailors as they patched up the broken door and stamped off into the night.

For a while the beaten man huddled against the wall, listening to the eery whining of the wind. A storm was sweeping down from the polar wastes. Soon the wilderness would be covered with a garment of spotless snow. But winter and summer would be the same to the two men who were chained up like dogs in their vile-smelling kennel. There would be no more camps out under the open skies of the northland for them so long as De Friers was master of the wilderness miles.

Rod Selkirk rebelled at the thought. He knew there always was one weak mesh in the web of evil men. He must find that one place where the strands were rotten. Then De Friers must pay for the suffering of Tom Larkin.

Still groping for some means of escape, he fell asleep.

V.

He was awakened by the voice of Tom Larkin.

"Don't you tell them a thing, Rod—promise you won't tell. They would kill us both as soon as they found out."

Selkirk shook the sleep from him. It was broad daylight. The old man stared at him from the end of his chain.

The madness had left the old hunter's

eyes. But the daring had also vanished. Tom Larkin's spirit had broken at last under the torture of his imprisonment.

"Sure I won't," Rod promised. "I'm going to get that bunch yet—see if I don't?"

"I thought I was going to get them myself when I discovered that they were stealing all the best skins that passed through the post—but they got me instead."

There was a new sound in the wind. Selkirk looked up. A few flakes of snow were fluttering past the window. Soon everything was hidden in a wall of dancing white.

The sound of footsteps came from outside, and De Friers stumbled in under a heavy load. He threw a few scraps of food to his prisoners, and placed a sack of raw mink-skins in front of each—his allotment for the day.

The old man reached out for his sack of fur, and began work without his breakfast.

The hawk-eyed task-master caught up a dog-whip from the wall and snapped its sharp lash across the head and shoulders of the prisoner who had lost his appetite.

"Come, son, take your bitters. You got to eat or you can't work," the furman tormented his helpless victim as the lash fell once more.

Tom Larkin squealed pitifully as the stinging rawhide coiled about him. With a feigned eagerness he gulped the scraps of food.

"That's the way he is going to die tonight if you don't come across with a map of the hunting-grounds," De Friers threatened as he walked away.

With a hopeless rebellion flaming in his heart, Rod Selkirk began work upon the filthy skins. The broken blade from a table-knife was the only tool the crafty jailor had allowed him.

Outside the blizzard shrieked and whined. The cold crept in through the log walls, and the two prisoners heaped the furs about their feet to keep them from freezing.

Like an unthinking machine, Tom Larkin labored over the skins. There was a dumb resignation in his face that told of a broken spirit. But the brain of the younger man was busy, searching for some means of escape.

However, De Friers had left no weak spot in the deadly web he had spun about them.

The heap of scraped skins grew higher and higher as Rod slashed away at the offensive grease, and the bag that held his day's allotment shrank in size. Then the searching fingers of the new-made peon touched cold iron among the mink-pelts.

A great hope surged up in his heart at the thought of a possible weapon. In fancy the battle already was won, and he was free to wander once more upon his beloved game-trails.

He sank deeper than ever into the hopeless depression of the condemned man when he fished out a wolf-trap that some hunter had forgotten to remove from his bag of furs.

But the old habits were heavy upon the man who had spent his life in the forest. Thoughtfully he toyed with the steel contrivance, setting and resetting it. At last he concealed it under a layer of mink-fat, and fastened the chain to the lower log of the building.

It was slow work, as he had nothing but the heel of his shoe with which to drive the staple into the wood. But it was a welcome change from scraping the skins.

Carefully he shoved the trap and its covering of fat beyond the reach of his hands. Several times he was forced to draw it back by the chain and begin all over. At last it was fixed to his satisfaction. He resumed work upon the skins with a new energy.

In the middle of the day there was the soft thud of feet in the snow outside. A key-chain jingled and the click of the padlock announced a visitor.

The door swung open with a rush of cold air, and a cloud of snow came swirling into the room. Rod glanced up.

Louie Raus stood smiling at him.

"How did you get here?" Selkirk demanded.

"On the same ship with you—kept to my stateroom—and had a man take me out from Whitehorse," the fur-man chuckled. "You've been playing a losing game right from the start."

"How did you come to know I was heading up this way?" Rod insisted with a shade less resentment in his voice.

Raus showed a mouthful of well-kept teeth. "We knew you would go as soon as you read the note. You passed it up three times, and we kept carrying it back to your table."

"Then it was a plant—just to get me up here into your bull-pen?"

"No, Tom wrote the note all right—but I happened to find it first—and I let it help me play my game. I just wanted to show you what you are bucking up against. It isn't the wilderness law—no strong-arm stuff will work here. It's brains you are up against. As soon as you get that through your skull you'll be ready to talk business."

"Sure about that?"

"I got a proposition that don't need any argument," Raus indulged in what was intended to be a friendly smile. "You see we intended to split the loot in the middle—but the company detectives got to be such a nuisance that I had to take the parson in to help me with the Seattle end of the business."

"You got a good mate all right," Rod sneered.

"Sure I did—I never make any mistakes in my men." The assistant manager smiled over his own cleverness. "He was taking a watch out of a man's pocket, and I got the goods on him. After that he was mighty glad to come in and help play the game. That's another case of brains."

Rod said nothing to take any luster from the man's self-asserted prowess.

"Well, when the parson came into the game, that changed things," Raus went on. "We had to split the loot three

ways. That meant we had to drive a harder bargain than ever, to make it worth while for us. Now you do your business with me—on the quiet, you know—and I'll make it all right with you and the old man."

"What's your terms?" Rod sparred to gain time.

"You draw me a map of the secret valley and I'll turn you loose. De Friers and the parson will think you made your getaway. I'll send a man to see if you have played fair on the map—and I'll hold Tom as a hostage."

Rod knew that the north would be a very unhealthy place for the gang of fur-thieves the minute he regained his liberty. He realized that Raus wasn't fool enough to give him an even break in the game, now that he had his enemy down. But there was nothing in his voice to indicate that he suspected treachery.

"Give me something to write on—I'm hungry to get out into the woods again." Rod Selkirk fairly radiated happiness.

He reached a hand for the pencil and paper Raus offered, and carefully began work upon a fake map. When it was finished he hesitated.

"I'm selling out too cheap," he pondered as he crumpled the sheet of paper in his hand, and gave it a measured toss among the mink-fat.

Raus eyed the discarded map and measured the length of the prisoner's chain with a careful glance.

Then he made a dive for the piece of paper that lay temptingly exposed in the littered grease.

There was a snap of steel jaws, and a howl of rage from the fur-man who sprawled among the rancid scrapings.

Rod Selkirk reached out a long arm, caught hold of the trap-chain, and began hauling his helpless enemy toward him. Raus was like a baby in the hands of the man who had been educated in the hard school of the wilderness.

For a moment his cries mingled with the shrieking of the gale outside. Then a heavy hand shut off his breath.

Rod Selkirk stepped back panting when the scuffle was over. His shirt had been torn open, but he was free.

Louie Raus was chained to the wall, and his gagged, bound figure had been molded into a position that suggested sleep.

VI.

As soon as he had unfastened the padlock that held Tom a prisoner, the young man removed the two keys he had used to free them from their chains and hid them in the corner of the room.

The old man reeled as he walked. Rod forced him to pace back and forth across the little room that he might regain the use of his legs.

He now had to contrive some way to relock the door. De Friers would miss his bunch of keys. He must find them still hanging in the door when he came back.

After hard work Selkirk managed to remove the bolt that held the hasp. Then he snapped the padlock into its usual place and left the keys swinging from it. With the help of a string he drew the bolt back through the door and secured it. Then he settled down to wait for the finish of the game.

The night-shadows were beginning to sift through the swirling snowflakes when Rod, watching from the window, saw De Friers hurrying toward the cabin.

He motioned for Tom to go back to his corner. Then he took up his own position close to the door.

He knew it would be no easy job to overpower De Friers. That wiry Frenchman weighed over two hundred pounds, and was as full of fight as a wild-cat.

Rod heard the man stamp up and set his rifle against the wall. He fumbled a moment with the lock, and the door swung open.

The trapper knew the only safe thing was to shoot the slave-master on sight. But he always had taken a chance in a fight—and he took one now.

De Friers was well within the room

when Rod struck. The blow landed where it was aimed, and the big man settled to his knees.

He staggered to his feet before Selkirk could strike again, and his hand was reaching for a weapon.

Rod pinned the slave-master's arms down in a bearlike hug. Tom Larkin sprang from his corner, as ready as ever to fight for the safety of a friend. His legs collapsed before he reached them. Crawling like a wounded animal, he endeavored to get into the battle. But the straining antagonists were whirling in a giddy death-dance and managed to keep beyond the reach of his grasping arms.

The trapper realized that his only hope lay in keeping his hold about the body of his adversary. De Friers had won his place as master of the Wolf Cañon country by the power of his bull-like muscles. Rod never could hope to win in a fair fight. There was one other chance. He might suddenly release his hold upon the slave-driver and draw the pistol which he had taken from Raus, but Rod Selkirk was not prepared for such drastic measures as yet.

As the minutes passed he felt the strength seeping from his body, and knew he could keep his hold upon the enraged Frenchman but for a short time.

At last the moment came when Rod Selkirk must decide whether his own life was worth the price of another man's blood.

But in that instant something beyond his control made that decision unnecessary. The struggling fur-man sent him lurching against the wall, and Rod's weapon thudded to the floor. He was helpless.

With a roar of rage De Friers tore himself from the trembling arms that encircled him and plunged after the exhausted trapper.

For the time the Frenchman had ceased to be a man. He was an animal of the wilderness who fought with tooth and nail, and never thought to draw a weapon.

Warily Rod eluded his flailing blows, and worked his way to where Tom Larkin swayed drunkenly upon his hands and knees. If they came to close quarters the old man might be able to give his young friend some much-needed help.

Then across the massive shoulders of De Friers, Rod Selkirk saw the parson come lunging through the door. With a groan he dodged the blow the Frenchman aimed at him, and scurried along the wall, searching with hands and feet for the lost pistol, determined to sell his life as dearly as possible.

The blows he expected to rain down upon his back did not materialize. Instead, the heavy body of De Friers came swaying through the air, and fell beside him on the dirt floor.

But the fur-man made no effort to regain his feet. Like a lithe-limbed panther the parson stepped toward them and dragged the limp form of his confederate into the middle of the room.

One moment he fumbled over the unconscious man. Then he rose with a slow smile breaking up the studied solemnity of his face.

There was the stamping of feet, and two constables of the Mounted Police stalked into the room.

"Don't let that fellow get away," Rod

pointed an accusing finger at the parson. "He has got more brains than the rest of the bunch put together. If you let him escape the company 'll break you for it!"

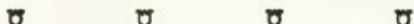
"He's valuable all right," agreed one of the policemen. "I reckon he'll be worth a million dollars to the Hudson Bay people yet, if some fur-thief don't get wise to him and stick a knife between his ribs. But that is all in the game—hey, parson?"

"Sure," grinned the officer. "Us fellows take a lot of risks, and play some queer games—but this is the first time I ever smuggled a wolf-trap in to a prisoner so he could catch the jailer. They say 'once a trapper—always a trapper,' and Selkirk hadn't forgot how to make a wolf set."

A volley of half-strangled oaths welled up out of the thick neck of De Friers. He brandished his manacled hands. There was flecks of yellow foam upon his lips.

"Take it easy, old fellow," one of the officers smiled. "If the curses of fur-thieves amounted to anything the parson would have died a hundred times—I guess he has sent about that many of your breed to the pen already."

"A hundred and three, counting this last bag," the pious-faced man nodded solemnly.



LIGHT AND DARKNESS

BY MARGARET G. HAYS

THE sky is blue, cerulean—words are weak
To paint its happy azure, clear and bright.
So is my heart and life, when thou art nigh,
And smiling upon me.
Sudden a thund'rous cloud, vast, billowing,
Obscures the glorious sky;
The earth trembles, reft of joyance,
Darkened—gloomed,
Before the shadow of the coming storm.
So with my heart and life, dear love,
When thou dost frown.

His Temporary Wife

by Robert Ames Bennet

Author of "Finders Keepers," "The Missing Key," etc.

SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS

NAN ROSE, a pretty, red-haired hospital nurse who has not yet graduated, is assigned to nurse Howard Eliot, a dyspeptic millionaire, at his home, assisting Dr. Gould. Eliot has quarreled with his son Arthur, especially over his friendship for Verna Devore and her brother, declaring them to be a vampire and an adventurer respectively. He makes a new will, apparently concerning Nan, and gives a sealed document into her keeping, to be opened by her sixty days after his death. A visit from Verna and Devore excites Eliot very much, giving him a heart attack. Nan gives him a hypodermic, but he falls dead.

Dr. Gould discovers, through Devore's suggestion, that the hypodermic syringe was filled with clear water. In consequence Nan is discharged from the hospital. She tries desperately to find work without avail, and finally sees an advertisement for a "temporary wife." It proves to be Arthur Eliot, who finds that he will lose all his father's estate if he marries Verna. At her suggestion he seeks a temporary wife, to be divorced as soon as the estate is turned over to him, when he will be free to marry her. At first Nan refuses; then she discovers that the document entrusted to her by Eliot is a will leaving everything to her. She marries Arthur, who gives her a check for \$5,000. While the bank is making a fuss over paying it she faints from excitement and lack of food.

Judge Laton, Eliot's family lawyer, comes to the bank just before Arthur, Verna, and Devore arrive, and shows that he is suspicious of the affair. In consequence Arthur takes Nan shopping, and she buys some effective clothes. A dinner-party is given at the Eliot mansion, at which Nan far outshines Verna. Judge Laton stays over night and finds in the morning that Nan and Arthur have occupied different rooms. He charges Arthur with an attempt to evade the provisions of the will, and announces that he can annul the marriage and have Arthur and his plotters arrested for attempting to obtain the money under false pretenses.

As the only solution of the impasse, Nan asks Arthur, whom she loves, to make her his wife in fact. He consents, as does Verna, since she can see no other way to get him; and when they return from a wedding journey, Nan hints to Judge Laton of a great secret. Arthur, who has no inkling of it, refuses flatly to seek a separation; and Nan, after a stormy scene with Verna, has to pretend to be a fortune-seeker in order to get him to agree. She goes to a quiet inn out in the country to rest, and is attacked by Devore. She escapes from him and scrambles through a window into a two-story house near by.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A FAILURE.

JUDGE LATON sat in the library of the Eliot mansion, his beetle brows bristling with an anxious frown and his fat lips out-thrust in a pout of distress and protest. Arthur Eliot was pacing the floor before the big lawyer, restless and uneasy yet coldly determined.

"I tell you, Judge, it is no use arguing. The matter is settled, once and for all. She has left me of her own free will, after I was dupe enough to call off all that temporary arrangement."

"But considered how the girl—"

"I have considered," broke in the young man. "How many times must I go over again the whole miserable blunder? I've laid all my cards on the

This story began in the All-Story Weekly for February 24.

table—and I find that you already knew what they were. You told me before that you abetted the marriage—that you schemed to get the girl into it.— Which, by the way, brings up another point. How do I know that you and she did not scheme it together?"

"You have my word that she knew nothing of my share in the matter—any more than did Verna Devore when she suggested to you the idea of the temporary marriage."

"We will leave Miss Devore out of this," stated Eliot with cold finality. "I can assure you the idea originated with myself; not with my fiancée or her brother."

"You no doubt believe that," rumbled Judge Laton. "Nevertheless the real truth of the matter is that the idea originated with your father."

Eliot's lips quirked in an ironical smile. "Oh, come, judge! I never took you for a humorist."

"Nor am I, in the present instance. Browning and your father are the ones responsible for this bit of human comedy. You never realized the intensity of your father's delight in the poet's involved psychology. There was an odd twist to his brain. Take, for instance, his fancy that Nan was another Pippa."

"I cannot say it speaks well for Pippa."

"You mean you cannot see!" thundered the Judge. "But that is beside the mark. We were speaking of the inception of the temporary marriage scheme. Your father formulated the plan, along with the rest of his scheme, and instructed me to further it in certain contingencies. After the will was filed, your fiancée found occasion to sound me with regard to its provisions. In compliance with your father's instructions, I led her to infer that the will would be complied with if you should legally marry another woman, even though but for a day."

"Thanks!" gibed Eliot bitterly. "You make it perfectly clear what an unmitigated ass and dupe I've been. One thing, though—Miss Devore may have uncon-

ssciously transferred to me your so subtle suggestion; but she neither proposed nor advised such-a scheme, and she agreed to it only after much urging from me."

"I can well believe that."

"Glad you admit it. Hope you're satisfied with the final results of my father's psychological involution."

"By no means. The plan worked perfectly up to a certain point. We had the expected reactions—the girl's readiness to enter into the marriage because of a certain factor still unknown to you, and her willingness to consummate the sacrifice when I applied pressure; then your expected reaction, as shown by your decision that she should remain your wife. But there intervened one of the unforeseeable cross-currents of the eternal feminine. She jilts you—"

"For hard cash!"

"No, no. I cannot believe it!"

"Suit yourself. As for me, I'm done with it all—I'll chuck the whole mess. You're welcome to your proof of conspiracy to defraud. Dock me to the last dollar, and have over with it! I stand pledged to clear Len Devore's account at the Ritz-Carlton. If you care to pay that, I will be obliged to you. For the rest—Well, I've told you. I thought my father wished to give me a square deal, there at the last. If you think otherwise, I have nothing more to say."

"My dear boy, your father's every thought was to do his very utmost for you. That is why he planned this device with regard to the marriage."

"Oh, cut it, Judge. I tell you it's no use to—"

The young man stopped to frown at the violently ringing telephone on the desk. It continued to ring. He went to snatch it up.

"Hello! What? Who's this speaking? Oh, it's you— What!—"

The tone of the exclamation fixed Judge Laton's glance upon his companion's face. It's expression had abruptly changed from impatience to astonishment—

"Yes, yes, I'm Arthur. What's that?

Don't speak so fast— Held as burglar?— Devore's crazy wife? You can't mean— Yes, I hear; I have it—twenty-six-eighty-one. But what street? Give me the name of the street! All right. I'll come and see— Hello, hello! *hello!* Yes, this is Mr. Eliot speaking, officer— Mr. Arthur Eliot. No, not Devore's wife—mine! If you will. Thanks! I'll come at once."

The young man set down the telephone, his face tense with anger. He turned to ring for Meiggs.

"Wait!" interposed Judge Laton. "Don't stop for your car— Use my coupé. I take it, Nan is in trouble!"

"Might have expected it," growled Eliot. "Some disreputable mess with Devore—bah! I'm getting my medicine all right. Hope you're satisfied."

"You blind dunce!" bellowed the lawyer. "That little girl? It's the dirty work of your precious Len Devore! I'll go myself. If he has harmed her, I'll wring his pretty neck!"

"No need for you to get excited," rejoined Eliot. "I said I'd go, didn't I? Sit down. Your coupé won't hold three, with you one of them."

"It would hold me alone—going—if I could drive fast at night! For God's sake!—she your wife—drive like the devil!"

Stirred by the other's passionate outburst, Eliot flung out his hand in a gesture of assent and ran from the library. Without stopping for a hat or cap, he dashed out to jump into the lawyer's coupé and send it whirring. There were no traffic officers on the streets he traversed, and the smooth-running little coupé shot past the few patrolmen before they could so much as hail it.

The darkness and poor pavement of the suburban streets toward the last compelled Eliot to slacken speed. But he soon came to the street and number given to him over the telephone by Nan. He was led direct to the right house by the fact that it was the only lighted one in the row of ramshackle two-story frames.

A small withered man, with nightshirt

tucked in plasterer's overalls, peered from the doorway as the coupé came to a stop before the house. The hatless visitor approached him frowningly.

"I am Mr. Eliot. I had a telephone call from this address."

"You're him, hey?" grunted the man. "Then mebbe the little redhead ain't a lyin' after all."

"She is my wife," explained Eliot with cold distinctness.

"Yourn, hey? T'other gent says she's hisn and plumb looney, to boot. Sure is suthin' skewgee with her, bustin' in, way she done. M' ol' 'oman yells 'P'lease!' like bloody murder, an' after the cop come, this Devery he come an' says—"

"Where is he?" demanded Eliot.

The man gaped. "My, my! Can't be you'n' him're so turibly friendly like? Why, he jes' went out a bit ago to git someun he says 'll prove the gal's his wife."

"Show me to her at once."

The man grunted doubtfully, but drew back and opened the door at the side of the boxlike vestibule. Eliot stepped through into a wretchedly furnished parlor. Near the cheap wall telephone he saw a policeman and a gaunt gray-haired woman sitting as if on guard. Before them Nan was curled up in a big old armchair. The front and skirt of her dressing robe were torn, her slippers were scuffed and one was split, and the red tresses of her forward drooping head were loose and disheveled.

The movement of the alert policeman when Eliot came in roused the girl from her dejected lassitude. At sight of her husband she sprang up, and a smile of deep thankfulness and joy lighted her face —only to vanish as she met his cold stare.

"Well," he said, "this is a nice mess to drag my name into. May I ask you kindly to explain?"

The bitterness of his tone silenced the appeal that was on Nan's lips. Pride and anger stiffened her lax figure and hardened the gaze of her gray eyes. She answered him with equal bitterness:

"I supposed my husband was the proper person to send for. Excuse me for the mistake."

"No, you were not mistaken. But we cannot talk here. If you'll come with me—"

"Hold on. Not so fast, mister," put in the policeman. "The young woman broke into this house. She claims she did it only to hide from that other man. But if these people charge her with burglary I must run her in."

"My, my, my, no!" disclaimed the wizened plasterer.

"Lawzy sakes, no!" chimed in his wife. "Ennybody c'n see she ain't no buggler—she's a real leddy. 'F on'y she'd 'a' come an' knocked an' not went an' skairt the life outer me an' the ol' man."

Eliot handed his card to the policeman, who looked at it and then at Nan.

"You claimed to be Mrs. Eliot and wouldn't go with that Dover. How about going with Mr. Eliot?"

"He may take me or leave me, just as he pleases," replied Nan. "I do not care a particle, one way or the other."

"You know I cannot leave you here," said Eliot.

She looked indifferently around the room and then at the comfortable old chair in which she had been resting.

"How about the other man—Dover?" queried the officer. "He said he'd bring a witness. Looks shady to me. Your missus sure put her mark on him! Want to prefer charges against him?"

Nan met Eliot's inquiring glance with the same indifference that she had shown in gazing about the room. Her anger against him had cooled and hardened into the resentment of outraged love. He saw that she was determined to say nothing.

"I will decide after talking over the matter with my wife," he answered the policeman. "I shall take her home—Here is something for a box of cigars, officer, with my compliments—And a trifle to you, madam, for your trouble."

"Lawzy me! lawzy sakes alive!" chittered the woman. "A twenty—a real live

twenty!—Hol' the lamp for the gem-man an' leddy, Sim. Shine 'em out."

With no lessening of her indifference, Nan walked out of the house beside Eliot and permitted him to hand her into the coupé. When they reached the better lighted streets he spoke without glancing aside at her: "Now, if you will, tell me what happened."

"Do you really wish to know?" she asked with a sweetness that should have warned him.

"Certainly. You are still my wife."

"That is so. Well, you see, I hurried away from you this afternoon because I was wild to keep an appointment with Lennie. But we quarreled over his share of what I'm to make you pay. I knocked him down, and it made him so mad he chased me through the garden and over the wall."

"Why are you lying to me?" asked Eliot.

"Oh, well, part of it is true."

"A half-lie is the worst. Why are you lying to me?"

"Because I hate you!" said Nan with a cold intensity that silenced him.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE SERAPH.

JUDGE LATON was pacing the library like a caged bear when Nan drifted in as white and silent as a wraith. He hurled his bulky body to meet her, his big face grotesque with horror.

"My God, child! Your dress—your look! That devil Devore—did he—?"

"No," answered Nan in a flat, lifeless tone. "I knocked him back through the transom, and got down from the window and over the wall."

"*Harr!* the scoundrel!—Where's Arthur? Gone back to find and kill him?"

"I sent Arthur up-stairs while I had my talk with you," said Nan in the same dead tone. "He doesn't understand what happened. I lied to him."

"Lied? Why?"

"Because I hate him and—and they would put him in jail when he killed that yellow-beast."

"Nan, look me in the eye—don't attempt to deceive me! You love your husband!"

"I hate him!" she cried with a sudden outflare of passion. "I became his true wife—I gave him his fortune, myself, everything! Yet he clung to his love for her. He still loves her!"

"You still love him, my dear."

The girl burst into a harsh laugh. "Oh, yes, how I must love him—when he took all, and let me go, so that he could get her—when he came there after me and told me I'd smirched his name! Oh, yes, indeed, I love him dearly! How could I help it!"

"Then it is not true he offered to set aside the agreement that you were to be only temporarily his wife? The unprincipled young liar!"

Nan's eyes blazed with fierce resentment.

"I'll thank you, sir, to remember you're speaking of my husband! He is not a liar. He told you the truth. He insisted on my staying. It was all my fault—my nasty temper and pride. He can't help being silly over that goldie cat. She never scratches him. He doesn't even know she has claws. He's just a boy. I won't have him blamed, I tell you."

The lawyer turned away the shifty glances of his twinkling eyes and screwed up his fat face in a portentous frown.

"Madam, when I gave you my word this afternoon, it was under a total misapprehension of the facts. I will not say that you misrepresented the situation, but I had reason to believe that you and your husband were permanently joined together in wedlock. For that reason I was willing to overlook your husband's previous attempt to defraud the estate of his father."

"He didn't! You're simply unbearable! His father really wished him to have it all."

"I cannot go back of the provisions of

the will, madam, and now I assert the right to revoke my promise to you. All this affair has the aspect of a conspiracy. If you hate him, as you affirm, you will be pleased to see him lose the estate."

"I won't!" denied Nan. Her eyes flashed with triumphant exultance. "And he sha'n't lose anything! It's his already, because I married him."

"But if I—"

"You and your will have nothing whatever to do with it. My will was made afterward, so yours is no good. I know that much."

"Your will? May I ask you to elucidate, madam? The question is not your will or mine, but the will of Howard Eliot, deceased."

"His last will—that's what I'm talking about—the one that gives everything to me."

For a full two seconds Judge Laton held the gaze of his shrewd eyes on her exultant face.

"I did not think you would trifl with me, my dear."

"Who is? It was in that sealed envelope I showed you—the one that wasn't to be opened for sixty days. The morning Arthur asked me to marry him I wouldn't because—because it would have been doing it for pay. But then I opened the letter and saw I must do it to save him his inheritance."

"That is rather obscure to me. I fail to see how your marriage to him—"

"Yet you're a lawyer!" rallied Nan. "Why, it's so absurdly simple. Just as soon as we were married, all my property became his. That's the law. A wife can't own any property. It all belongs to her husband."

The judge's big mouth gaped in an O of amazed delight.

"What—what—what! You married him so that he could come into your fortune and then cast you off penniless? You quixotic little fire-crowned seraph!"

"I'm no such thing. And it wasn't my fortune—only a kind of trust, and he gave me that five thousand. It would have

been all settled and over with if you hadn't said you'd an-annul the marriage. That would have undone everything. So of course I had to make him—go on."

"Of course—of course!" repeated the beaming lawyer. He gave his thigh a resounding thwack. "Of course—you being yourself! The more I consider the perspicuity and insight of Howard Eliot, the more profound becomes my admiration and esteem for his mentality. He made his wealth by reading the character of his associates and employees and opponents. The event proves the certitude with which he gauged your character."

"It was easy enough to guess that no honest girl would keep Arthur's inheritance."

"My dear little seraph, permit me to make a confession. I knew all about your will. That sixty-day instruction on the envelope was devised as the last test of your character. You have done all that Mr. Eliot expected of you. But there is one point as to which you appear to be laboring under a misapprehension. By common law all title to a single woman's—a *feme sole's*—property vested in her husband upon marriage. But this no longer holds. By statute law the wife now retains title to all her property."

Nan's eyes widened with dismay. "Oh, but I thought— Why, I'm sure I remember Mr. Eliot's exact words. He stated positively that a wife's property still goes to her husband."

"My dear child, Howard Eliot was not a lawyer; he was an experimenter in psychology."

"But—but I thought— Oh, dear, what shall I do? You know Arthur. You know he'll never let me give even a part of it to him—now!"

"Not unless you and he become reconciled."

The young wife writhed. "He loves her—he showed it! And I've made him detest me."

"It is between you and that woman," stated Judge Laton. "You must save him. Show me your will."

She put a hand to her bosom, and then remembered. "It's in my old valise at that place."

The judge's lips pursed and pouted. "With your baggage—and that scoundrel Devore—! Must make sure of it immediately."

"I will go with you," volunteered Nan.

"No, quite Impossible—preposterous."

"There is nothing to fear with you along; and look at my dress. I must have one of my suits. Besides, we can't let Arthur go. He might find out about the will, and if the people are there, they won't know you or let you have my things, even if you could find the house."

"You must be exhausted."

"Not at all now."

He smiled and bent over the desk to pencil two lines on a sheet of paper. As he wrote, he spoke the words: "Going to get dress for Mrs. Eliot. We may or may not return."

"That last," objected Nan. "It's so uncertain."

The lawyer chuckled. "Quite true. Uncertainty may not be uncondusive to a favorable reshaping of his present frame of mind. Come."

As they went out into the corridor, Meiggs, the footman, ran at them from the stairway. He checked himself and stood at attention.

"Ah—beg pardon, if you please. There seemed to have been someone moving about—"

"Mr. Eliot and I came in a few minutes ago," explained Nan.

"Very good. Thank you, madam," murmured the man, and he ushered the two out at the side entrance.

CHAPTER XXV.

LOVE IN A COTTAGE.

AS the coupé started off around the drive with Nan and Judge Laton, the footman slipped back into the side corridor and secured the door with bolt and key. Having made doubly cer-

tain that the door was fast, he cocked his head and stood listening.

There were no suspicious sounds in the mansion so far as he could hear. He shook his head doubtfully and tiptoed along the hall to peer into the closet under the side stairway. But no burglar had stowed himself away in this convenient cubbyhole.

Rather agreeably disappointed, Meiggs backed out of the closet—and promptly stiffened to rigid tensity. From the library was coming the murmur of a low voice. At irregular intervals the murmurs became inaudible, as if a second speaker was replying to the first by gestures or almost soundless whispers.

Meiggs crept softly to the doorway and peeped in between the heavy Oriental curtains. A woman was seated at the library desk with her lips close to the transmitter of the telephone. At the footman's involuntary grunt of surprise the intruder looked up. He saw that she was Miss Devore.

With careful discretion, he stepped through the doorway and disclosed to the caller that her presence in the house was known: "Begging your pardon, miss. If you please, may I ask you to—"

She raised a finger for silence and calmly finished what she was murmuring into the transmitter. When she had no less calmly hung up the receiver she smiled at the footman with gracious condescension.

"Now, Meiggs, your master—where is he?"

"In his suite, miss, if you please. May I—"

"You may fetch him to me immediately—Oh, I say—a word. You understand that Mr. Eliot will desire no mention of my call."

"Indeed, yes, miss. I—"

"And there need be nothing said about your negligence with regard to the door. As it was ajar, I stepped in without ringing and waited in the music room until I heard the other visitors go. But I shall say nothing of your carelessness. The

best of servants may err on rare occasions.

"Yes, miss. Thank you. I shall call Mr. Eliot immediately, if you please."

She smiled and leaned back in her seat with quiet composure. Her hands lay folded in her lap, and her silken eyelids drooped languidly. There was no perceptible change in her easy attitude and tranquil look until a faint, rapid thudding told that Meiggs was bounding up the stairs.

In a flash the visitor sprang from her chair and glided across to the corridor doorway. She moved so swiftly that she was in time to glimpse the footman's feet and legs at the top of the stairs. The moment they disappeared she slipped into the hall and darted to the side door.

In a short time Eliot ran down the stairs and hurried along the hall to the library. Miss Devore was across near the other door, her white hands clasped together and her face convulsed with tragic despair. She appeared to be too distracted to notice Eliot's hasty entrance.

"Verna!" he exclaimed. "You here—alone! What has—"

A stifled cry of relief and appeal burst from her tense-drawn lips, and throwing out her arms, she flew to meet him. Like a terrified child, she flung her arms about his neck and clung to him, with her face pressed tight against his shoulder. Her bosom heaved and quivered upon his breast with the dry sobs that racked her beautiful body.

Never since his first meeting with her had he been so deeply stirred. His father's attacks on her had added chivalrous tenderness to his infatuation; but this abandonment of grief roused in him the basic instinct of the male to cherish and protect his love-mate.

"What is it, darling, what is it?" he urged. "Tell me! Tell me quickly! I must know—you must tell me, darling! Are you not mine to comfort! My darling wife-to-be!"

"Oh! oh! for you to say that!" she sobbed. "And poor Lennie!—When

you hear, you'll believe awful— Oh! oh! you've heard already!—and you believe! I knew it—I knew you would!"

Hard as he tried, he could not overcome the shudder of repulsion that he had felt when she spoke Devore's name.

"Not you, darling," he sought to reassure her. "It only adds compassion to my love for you. But I have every reason to believe that he is utterly unworthy of—"

"Wait! wait!" she breathlessly implored. "You've heard only one side. Listen! He called up while I was waiting for you. He was coming straight to you to demand that you do him the justice of listening to the truth of that dreadful happening. Poor boy! he had agonized over what you must have imagined from the little idiot's disheveled appearance and her gibberings."

"She gave me only a garbled account, but I—"

"You are fair—you'll give Lennie fair play!" cried the quivering lady, and she tightened her convulsive clasp on Eliot's neck. "Oh, I know how incredible you'll think his side of the story. She's a woman and young and still your wife."

"Yes, she is still my wife," agreed Eliot. "Yet I will try to listen. What did he tell you?"

"You speak so coldly, Arthur dear! But it's most good of you to listen— You know how very good hearted and impulsive is Lennie. You'll remember he took a foolish fancy to the little red-headed chit that very first day, when you brought her from the hospital. Afterward, when she was starving, he twice tried to befriend her."

"She has another name for that," put in Eliot.

"Indeed, yes, the little idiot! That's what is behind all this dreadful mess. As I was saying, he was silly enough to take this great fancy to the girl. So, when she left you, what must he do but rush after her, in his impulsive way, and offer his devoted services."

"Go on. I am listening," urged Eliot,

as his fiancée stopped to gaze up imploringly into his stern face.

Her own face hardened slightly and her voice sharpened—

"Understand me, I do not charge that the girl is unbalanced, though to be sure she acted as mad as a March hare. Nor does Lennie pretend to be able to explain her wild conduct. His only conjecture is that, if she really is not mad, his knock at the door must have started her from a nightmare into a frenzied panic."

"He is your brother, Verna. I cannot blame you for seeking to defend him. But his story is quite too preposterous. There is his pursuit of her to explain, and his claim that she was his wife."

"His mad wife! Don't you see? Of course he followed her, after she barricaded her door and smashed the transom and window and jumped out like a maniac. Would you have allowed any woman to run off in such a state? And about his mad-wife claim—like so many of Lennie's doings, it was foolish but well-meant. He thought to keep your name and mine out of the affair. His idea was to get her back to the place, into the care of the proprietress, and then explain. Now you see, my dear. It is all very clear, is it not?"

Eliot bent over and kissed her fair forehead tenderly.

"My darling, there is only one thing clear to me in all this damnable muddle. That is, we love and can trust each other absolutely. Nothing else matters—not the loss of my fortune—not even if Len has done what—"

"Your fortune!" shrilled Miss Devore. "But you told me the fat attorney agreed to give you all!"

"He gave his word to her; and now she has an interest at stake. She might be able to persuade him to keep his promise," replied Eliot. "But that is not the question, my dear. I have come to see my mistake. You remember you advised against the temporary marriage."

"But you showed me that your father—"

"That is all by the bye, as you say, my dear. The point now is that I see clearly what I should have seen at first. My father did not change his will, and he did not withdraw his unjust opposition to you. He gave me my choice clear cut—you or the estate. Yet I persuaded myself that it would be fair to try for the estate. I could not bring myself to think of depriving you of all that I had counted upon giving you. But now I see how wrong I was. I see—"

"Oh, no, no, Arthur!" remonstrated Miss Devore, thrusting herself out of his arms, to stand off and gaze at him in anxious reproach. "You proved to me your moral right to your inheritance; and now that you have suffered so much to win it, you must—you shall keep what is yours!"

Eliot smiled at her wistfully.

"I have paid for my mistake, Verna. A man cannot juggle with his honor. To buy the dollars I put myself in a position where I could not honorably do otherwise than offer to keep her. You see how near I came to losing you. I realize now what you saw at the very first. Better for me to come to you with clean though empty hands than wealthy and dishonored."

The scarlet lips of the lady straightened in thin lines. "My dear Arthur, you know that I can never permit you to sacrifice your inheritance. Do not be absurd."

"On the contrary, darling, I have at last come to my senses. What do we want more than each other's love? I shall chuck all the filthy lucre. Laton will stand good for Len's Ritz-Carlton account. So we've nothing to do but rent a cottage, and marry and live happy ever after."

She did not respond to his tender banter. Her eyes hardened, and the coolness of her voice chilled his ardent glow.

"You forget the necessity for a divorce, and then the small matter of an income. With a fair amount of credit, we might be able to start housekeeping on five thousand a year."

The amount brought a shade of doubt into Eliot's eyes. "My dear, I know little about business, but I rather think a beginner does not usually step into a salary of five thousand dollars, even though—"

"Pardon me," she interrupted. "I of course meant pounds."

He stared in blank astonishment. "But, Verna, surely you can't realize! Nearly twenty-five thousand dollars!"

"Quite true, my dear Arthur. I am accustomed to think—and shop—in pounds; not in dollars or francs or pennies. I never dreamed that you could expect us to live like paupers!"

The young man's eyes clouded; but his lips set with a grimness strangely like that of his father's mouth during the last days of suffering.

"Love in a cottage—but the cottage must be at Newport. Sorry I misunderstood."

"No more than I, Arthur dear," she sighed. "But I shall not allow you to say anything final now. You will sleep on it, and see how needless would be the sacrifice for a belated and absurd quibble of conscience."

"Please make no mistake as to that, Verna. The matter is settled. I will not now take the estate in any event."

Though her eyes narrowed, her lips curved away from her white teeth in a dazzling smile. "Vow not, beloved! Man knows not what the morrow will bring forth. And now, my noble King Arthur, you will permit me to slip away as I came."

"I will see you to the Ritz-Carlton."

"By no means. I have a cab in waiting. Meiggs will see me to it."

"I must insist. I sent Meiggs down with instructions to keep himself and the other servants in their quarters unless called."

"Very well, then. But first, if you will kindly fetch me a glass of water, my dear."

He hastened out to do her the small service. When he returned with the wa-

ter she was not in the library. A sheet of writing paper was pinned from curtain to curtain of the corridor doorway. Across the middle of the sheet was the boldly penciled lettering of Judge Laton's note. Below this Miss Devore had added, in her thin, many-flourished hand:

May they stay away forever! Do not try to follow. I am off and away. Sleep on your decision, and dream happiness for your

V. D.

CHAPTER XXVI.

LAST COALS.

TO the no small surprise of Nan and Judge Laton, when the coupé at last brought them to the suburban residence-inn, they found the gate wide open. The judge drove through and along the curving drive to the front of the house.

The place was brightly lighted. But the visitors found the front door locked. After a time the judge's clanging of the old-fashioned door-bell was answered by a shrill call:

"Who is it? What do you want?"

"To get in. I'm Mrs. Eliot. Open the door," replied Nan. She added in a low voice to her companion: "It's that tabbycat woman. But there were two Japs, and perhaps *he* is still here."

"You may rely on me, my dear," assured the big lawyer as the door started to open.

At the sound of his deep voice the woman tried to thrust the door shut again. It was stopped by his thick-soled shoe. He had only to lean his bulk against the door to slide the woman back on the polished floor inside. She cowered before him as he crowded in and towered over her, his beetle brows bristling and his lips protruding in a stern pout.

"Where's that scoundrel Devore?" he thundered.

The woman gaped at him and blinked her yellow eyes.

"Devore?" she whined. "Surely, sir,

you can't mean that gentlemanly Mr. Devore? I thought he left when I ran out to take a basket of dainties to a poor, sick woman in the neighborhood. But surely he— Ah, here is the little lady—safe—not hurt—only her gown torn! The Lord be praised!"

"Where is that scoundrel Devore?" bellowed the judge.

The woman sidled around to fawn upon Nan.

"Dear madam, tell him! I had no part in it! I went out to that poor, sick neighbor. Only a few minutes ago I came back and found you gone, and all that frightful mess in your room. Who's to pay for the damage? There's the grille and the transom and—"

"Where is that—"

"Oh, sir, please don't shout so loud! You frighten me! He's gone. I haven't seen him. I don't know where he is."

"Take us to my room," interposed Nan.

With an ingratiating smile at her, the woman glided across to the cased stairway. They followed her up the steps and along the hall, Judge Laton warily eying with his restless glances the doors they passed. At the end of the hall a Louis Quinze chair with a newly shattered back stood close before the partly open door of Nan's room.

Judge Laton pushed ahead of the woman and put out his hand to open the door wider. The marble slab from the bureau had been loosened from under the inner door-knob, but the rest of Nan's barricade was still where she had planted it. The judge heaved at the door, and shoved the obstruction back as he had shoved back the woman at the front door.

The door wedged open far enough to admit his bulk, and to give his in-peering gaze a wide view of the littered room. His glances darted across the upset furniture over to the window. A man's hand was jerking down over the sill.

The judge uttered a grunting roar and charged across the room like an angered elephant. He checked his rush with his

hand against the window casing, and peered down between the ledge and grille at Nan's line of sheets. It was still shaking; and as the judge glared into the black shadows below, he heard the scurry of some one in swift flight.

"Stop, thief!" he bellowed. "You scoundrel, come back! We know you!"

The fugitive dashed around the corner of the house. Judge Laton faced about at a dismayed cry from Nan: "Oh! He's broken open all my things!"

Her steamer trunk and suit-cases and valise had been dragged from the alcove, their locks burst open, and all of Nan's clothes flung out on the floor. She ran to drop on her knees beside the valise and thrust her fingers into its pocket.

The pallor of her face as she looked up at Judge Laton told him more eloquently than words that her precious document had been taken.

"May be in the litter," he suggested, and he tried to bend down to the scattered mess of garments and shoes, keepsakes and toilet articles.

The woman edged forward to purr ingratiatingly: "Has your jewelry been taken, madam? Can't I assist in your—"

"Explain first," rumbled Judge Laton. "You said the scoundrel had gone."

"But how could I know, sir?" the woman questioned. "You saw how the door was blocked. I couldn't squeeze through. I was waiting for Yen and Shawa — my Japs. They're little and slim. The—the burglar must have hidden in the alcove when I looked into the room."

Judge Laton's incredulous snort brought an anguished protest from Nan: "What does it matter about her? The will is not here—not anywhere here!"

The lawyer made a gesture for silence, and stood with his brows pulled down and gross lower lip thrust up, while every faculty of his big brain concentrated in profound cogitation.

"Destroy?" he muttered. "No; unless as last resort. Suppress? Possible but not probable. Negotiate? Probable.

Now or later? Probably now. End of his rope. Chance of a split and disclosures. 'When thieves fall out — Oou-hah!'

"Oh! What is it?" exclaimed Nan, startled by the guttural ejaculation.

"May net the birds. Come! We must drive back instantly!"

"But my dress?"

"Don't bother. Can't wait to change. Bring one, if you must." He swung around to confront the woman as Nan caught up a hat and dress and pair of shoes. "Guard her property. I shall hold you responsible."

His manner gave her the impression that he was a detective. She followed him and Nan down to the front door and out on the porch, volubly protesting her innocence of complicity with Devore, and promising that Nan's property should not again be touched.

On the return trip Judge Laton queried Nan as to the exact wording of the stolen document and the summoning of the five servants to the sick-room before Howard Eliot had given her the sealed envelope. She spoke of these men as the witnesses to her will, but did not mention their signatures on the document. The lawyer pursed his fat lips.

Half a block from the Eliot mansion, Judge Laton observed a limousine at the curb. In passing it he veered his coupé so that one of the lamps glared full on the tonneau door of the larger motor. Even a glimpse would have been sufficient to make certain of the Eliot monogram. He drove on swiftly, but stopped before the front of the mansion.

"Step out, my dear," he directed in a throaty whisper. "If the front door is locked, come around to the side. If it is unlocked, enter, lock the door, and hide. I will see to the side door."

Nan sprang from the coupé so hurriedly that she forgot to leave her shoes and dress, which she had rolled together in a bundle. She was up the front steps and in the portico before the coupé rounded the bend in the drive.

With all the dignity that she could assume in her disheveled condition, she approached the door, half-expectant that Meiggs or the butler would draw it open and bow her in. But there was no one on duty at the imposing main entrance of the mansion.

Very gently she turned the knob and pushed. The heavy door started to swing inward on its well-oiled hinges.

Nan shivered with a chill premonition of evil. There was something uncanny in this openness of one of the richest mansions in the city. Meiggs or the butler should have been on duty beside the door, or it should have been locked.

But she recalled that Judge Laton had seemed to foresee the chance that the door would be unlocked. The fact gave her courage to slip inside, as he had directed. To fasten the spring latch and the bolt chain was the work of a moment for her nimble fingers.

She took the bundled dress and shoes from under her arm and started to tiptoe across the parquetry toward the onyx staircase. Her idea was to go softly up to the suite of rooms that had been hers and change from the slippers and torn dressing gown to the street dress and shoes in her bundle.

The house seemed ghostly still. She moved with utmost quietness, for she had not entirely thrown off the apprehension roused by the unlocked door, and she also felt a certain shame over this clandestine entrance into her husband's home. At the foot of the stairs she paused to listen.

A voice sibilantly sharp came hissing from the far part of the mansion's grand suite. The words were inaudible, but the menace in the tone could not be mistaken. Nan blanched with terror. She knew that hateful voice. Above it suddenly burst out the clear, full-toned voice of her husband:

"No, I tell you! Think of your sister, Len! Why, this is sheer blackmail! It's no go, I tell you. I've chucked the whole estate. Verna will tell you that. If this will is what you say, everything belongs

to my wife. At any rate, the paper is hers, by your own statement. Give it to me."

The demand was met by a sneering laugh and a taunt, to which Eliot's voice retorted with angry heat:

"I destroy it? You lying blackleg! D'you take me for a thief like yourself? Haven't you done enough to smirch the name your sister shares with you? If you have no decency over yourself, think of her! Good Lord! as if that attack on my wife—I tell you I'm keen enough already to give you a lacing you'll remember. Hand over that paper or I'll—What? You fool! Put down that pistol! Drop it!"

Nan was dashing through the drawing-room before Devore had hissed out his venomous retort. The deadly menace of his tone lent added swiftness to her fear-winged little feet. Every instant she expected to hear the crashing report of a pistol-shot—

Ages seemed to pass while she raced on through to the inner entrance of the library. Yet at last the half-drawn curtains were before her. She darted between them full tilt. What she saw in the room did not lessen her frantic fear. Though Devore stood facing three-quarters away from her, she perceived beyond his shoulder the small automatic pistol that he held pointed at the heart of her husband.

At sight of the inrushing girl, Eliot's cool defiance broke into sharp alarm: "Go back—back! He'll shoot you, too!"

Devore had already jerked his head around to look. Nan was flying at him like an infuriated kitten, her bundle up-raised above her head. The attack was as unexpected and even more frenziedly fierce than when she had knocked him out of the transom with the bedstead bar. Her brandished bundle appeared to his startled eyes a ponderous missile that would crush him.

He whirled to fire at her. At the same instant Eliot leaped at him, reckless of the pistol. But while Devore was still

twisting about, Nan hurled her bundle at his head. Instinctively he jerked up his right elbow to ward off the blow. The skirt of the unrolling dress draped over his crooked arm. The upper part, load-ed with the shoes, whipped over into his face.

Harmless as was the blow, it disconcerted the would-be murderer and delayed for a fraction of a second the freeing of his pistol hand and arm from the dress. Mad with her fear that he would kill Eliot, Nan flung herself upon him, clawing and striking like a little fury. He hurled her from him—only to crash down before Eliot's flying tackle.

In the fall, the pistol flew out of Devore's grasp. Nan darted to snatch it up while the two men thrashed about on the floor. Hard as Devore writhed and twisted, Eliot thought that he had him fast. But he was fighting a desperate man who had no conception of fair play. A foul blow of the heel broke Eliot's hold and doubled him up in agony.

The snarling victor whirled clear and sprang up to run at Nan. The upraised pistol and the steely glint in her gray eyes sent him swerving toward the corridor entrance.

From outside, Judge Laton swung his great bulk around into the doorway and spread his big arms to block the escape of the fugitive. He was gasping from hurry and excitement, but his grotesque mixture of scowl and grin would have daunted men larger than Devore.

With a curse, the trapped man doubled back. Eliot, still pale from the agony of the foul blow, struggled up and threw himself forward. But Devore was cutting across to the other doorway. Woman-like, Nan hesitated to shoot at one who was running away. As Devore dashed from the room, Eliot came between him and Nan. She hastily lowered the muzzle of the pistol.

The floor shook under the heavy yet elastic strides of Judge Laton. He was sprinting to the support of Eliot, who had now reached the doorway. First one

and then the other disappeared in hot chase of the fugitive.

Nan did not even attempt to join in the pursuit. With the flight of Devore all her frantic courage had vanished, and left her faint and weak and utterly unstrung. She stood listening to the rapid thud of the lawyer's ponderous tread that muffled the lighter footsteps of the others. Then came a shout of angry disappointment from Eliot, and the noise of the pursuit ceased.

CHAPTER XXVII.

TRUTH WILL OUT.

No longer held by the tension of listening to the pursuit, Nan dragged herself to the nearest chair. She sank into it with the feeling that she could never again rise of her own strength.

As she drooped back in the deep seat she heard the front door clang shut. This was followed by the sound of returning footsteps. Her lax muscles tautened, and she sprang from the chair in a flurry of hysterical fear. She dared not face Eliot. If he should come back before she could escape, she knew that she must fling herself into his arms and beg for his pity and love.

Judge Laton's voice boomed into the library ahead of the disappointed pursuers: "Front door wide open, my dear! Why didn't you lock it? We certainly would have— *Heigh!* What? Gone!"

The lawyer pushed through the doorway ahead of Eliot. Nan had disappeared, along with her dress and shoes. His shifting glance spied something in a chair. He turned aside, and saw that the object was Devore's pistol.

"Look here!" he grunted, holding the wicked weapon up before Eliot. "The plucky little red-head! Did you see her stand the scoundrel off with it? My one regret is that she did not fire."

Eliot's face was almost haggard with the conflict of his emotions.

"I believe she saved my life, judge. He had me covered. She flew at him like a little tiger. Yet *why*? I can't make it out. First I thought her the very soul of honor and generosity. Then she demanded a fourth of everything, and admitted that she had deliberately played to work on my feelings. Now it all comes out about the will she has been keeping secret—the will she duped my father into making to cheat me!"

"You bat!" rumbled Judge Laton. "You blind, brainless bat! And yet you admit she has just saved your life! Where's that will?"

"In Devore's pocket. He slipped it in with one hand while he drew out his pistol with the other."

"Did he read it to you?"

"Yes, and he held it close enough across the table for me to read. There's no doubt of it. She inveigled my father when he was angry at me and half out of his mind. I tell you, judge—"

"Not another word—not a word!" roared the lawyer. "Listen, you young numskull! I knew all about this. Your father put her to a test. He guessed her sterling worth, and he has proved it. She had no knowledge of what was in the sealed envelope he gave her. It was to remain sealed for sixty days. Do you know why she married you?"

"For money," retorted Eliot—"for my five-thousand-dollar check, delivered before we went to the city hall."

"Blind, blind, blind!—and you the son of Howard Eliot! If you can't see, at least open your ears. The girl was starving, yet she refused your five thousand. She had started to leave when she happened to see that the sixty days had expired. She opened the sealed envelope and found—what? You say Devore held it under your eyes. What did it say?"

"It is his will—my father's will—giving everything to her."

"Everything—and yet you believe she married you for money! She is no fool. She knew he wrote this after the will drawn by me. A last will alone is bind-

ing. She was certain that you were disinherited and that all—everything—was hers. Yet she married you under that humiliating temporary agreement. Why? Tell me that."

"I must own I never imagined she could have had any other reasons except—".

"Of course not! Of course not! You've seen only through the eyes of Verna Devore. Keep cool! I'm not indicting your blue-eyed angel. But I am advocate for a certain little flame-haloed seraph! Why did she marry you? Because your father had told her that the title to all a woman's property as a *feme sole* immediately vests on marriage *ipso facto* in the husband."

Eliot stared. "You surely do not mean—"

"I do. She tried her best to give you everything. Had you not thrust the check upon her, I believe she would have married you just the same and crept off to starve without a whimper."

A hot flush was beginning to burn in Eliot's dark cheeks. "But, I say, I had no idea that this— She did not give me the slightest hint!"

"No; all she gave was first her fortune and then herself."

"You mean when she—when we went on the trip. But I agreed to that because she— Judge, you must believe me! If I had known the truth—"

"The truth was that I threatened to annul the marriage unless it was consummated. That meant to her the annulment of the title to the property that she believed had been conveyed to you by the marriage. Now do you understand?"

"I — understand — now!" muttered Eliot. "She gave all to me—and then she gave herself!"

Judge Laton's small eyes twinkled. He pursed his fat lips and chuckled. "The joke of it is that she did not give you the property, after all."

"How's that?" demanded the young man, his shame-suppressed suspicions leaping up again. "If she still has it,

why did she demand a fourth as alimony?"

It was Judge Laton's turn to stare. "She did?"

"Yes. Mocking me, I suppose. And now this!"

The young man's voice was harsh with bitter pain.

"Think what you will of me, judge; but at least I tried to play up when I realized what a cad I'd been. I offered to make what amends I could to her. She refused to remain my wife—she demanded a fourth, like a cold-blooded harpy. Now you tell me she never meant that I should have anything!"

"Hold hard!" thundered the lawyer. "No twisting of my evidence, young man. I said she did not give you the property. That is not saying she did not mean to do so. The little goose believed your father—she believed that the common law is still in force regarding the property of a *feme covert*—of a wife. She did not know that the statute has superseded the husband's common-law right."

"Then you say she really believed she had done it? Why, that makes it all right, judge! It was this thought that she— Yet, how about her demand for the fourth? You take me? I'm not thinking of the money itself. It's the idea that she should seem to be so grasping, when I felt so sure of her trueness and generosity."

"At least she trusts your word, Arthur. Driving back, after we found that Devore had stolen her will, she exacted my promise to draw up as soon as possible an assignment of the estate from her to you."

Eliot flared with resentful anger. "I will not take a cent from her! If my father chose her as his heiress, she shall not force her charity on me."

The lawyer thrust out a fat finger at him.

"You need not accept a penny from her, my young friend, but you will accept her assignment."

"You seem very certain," scoffed Eliot.

"I am. This is why: your wife's assignment of the estate is not worth a penny."

"What? Must say I fail to get you."

"Did you see the signatures of any witnesses on that paper?"

"Why, I—no. But my father's signature?"

"Without a single witness. That supposed will is so much waste paper. But she believes it good—as your father intended she should. He had witnesses summoned to his room to carry out his deception of her. They did not sign. Her supposed will is not worth a penny. Yet she believes in it; and because of it she gave herself to you. Very well. You have your choice. Accept the assignment—or tell her that all she has done has been to carry out this pleasant little joke of your father's."

The young man flinched. "What do you take me for, Laton? After all that she has done? I don't care if she did demand the fourth. It was little enough, now that I know! But to tell her that cruel joke—I tell you I *can't!*"

Judge Laton flung out his hand in a broad gesture.

"You are right. Yet what can we do? I admit my share in the despicable affair. I will do for her what I can. Need I tell you how insufficient that will be? Before I take her away, may I suggest that you go to her and make a clean breast of it for your father and myself? She may be in my coupé, or she may have gone up-stairs to change her dress. I see she took it."

"No," replied Eliot, his mouth set with a stern resolve. "I will go and tell her that I will accept the assignment."

He went out into the corridor without looking at his companion. His departure was watched by flashing, twinkling glances of the lawyer's little, whitish eyes. And as Eliot disappeared the big, gross face broadened in a blissful Gargantuan

smile—a grin of exultant, benevolent cunning.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

HEIR OF ALL.

ELIOT found the *porte cochère* door locked. This seemed positive proof that Nan had gone up-stairs. There was small probability that she would have passed through to the front door when the coupé was at the side.

Impatient over his failure to find her, he took the stairs at a run—to the vast delight of the beaming watcher in the library doorway. From the top of the stairs Eliot hastened along the side hall to the main corridor.

He turned the corner—and stopped short. A woman stood at the far side of the head of the main stairway. She was stealthily beckoning on along the corridor toward the door of the suite that had been occupied by Nan. From the door was out-thrust the blond head and plaster-patched face of Devore.

At sight of Eliot the peerer's face distorted with fear and hate and jerked back through the doorway. Eliot dashed forward along the hall, shouting for Judge Laton. The woman twisted about with catlike quickness and sprang before him, her arms outflung in wild appeal. He saw that she was Verna Devore.

This discovery so astounded him that he half checked his rush. Her blue eyes were distended with deathly fear. She panted in fierce terror: "Go back—go back! Don't hurt him! It's for you—you!"

Instead of stopping Eliot, the cry stung him like a goad. Something frightful was happening to Nan. This beautiful woman who had fascinated him was shielding Devore—

He struck down her outreaching arm and bounded past her. She uttered a warning shriek: "Fox it, Magan! Jig's up! Loop the loop!"

Name and slang and tone, all spurred

Eliot to utmost haste. He rushed on along the corridor and whirled in at the boudoir doorway. The impetuous drive of his entrance carried him aslant to the side wall. A sweep of his glance showed him that he was alone in the room. But from the bedchamber came the sound of a quick scuffle and thud.

He dashed at the closed door and flung it open. Bedding and mattress lay on the floor beside the carved bedstead; but, as in the boudoir, there was no one in sight. The half-open door into his own bedroom seemed to offer the right clue. He guessed that the villain was doubling back to the corridor through the other suite. Verna had screamed the advice to "loop the loop."

A corner of the mattress lay between Eliot and the side door. He was bounding over it when his down-flashing glance happened to notice a little stocking foot half protruding from under the side of the mattress. A cry of horror burst from him, and he wrenched himself about to fling the mattress across the room.

On the floor lay Nan's motionless body, bound hand and foot. The head was wrapped tightly in a sheet. Wild with dread, he drew her up against his knee and whirled off the stifling coils of cloth. She was smothered.

Violently as his hands shook, he managed to open his penknife and slash the cords that bound her wrists and ankles. From down-stairs came an angry bellow and the reports of several pistol-shots in quick succession. But Eliot was scarcely aware of the uproar. He had drawn the pitifully limp little form over on its back and was working with it as with a drowned person.

The booming shouts of Judge Laton were answered by cries that told of the alarmed servants. Then came a rush of feet on the onyx stairway. First to reach his master was the valet. Eliot met him with a sharp command:

"Quick! Ammonia—sal volatile—vinegar—anything!"

The valet doubled back into the bedroom as Meiggs came panting to the bed-chamber door. The footman backed away at Eliot's order:

"Clear out! Stop the others! She's recovering."

Judge Laton came puffing through the doorway. The valet whipped in under his arm, handed an open bottle of sal volatile to his master, and slipped out at the gesture of dismissal. Judge Laton jarred down on his knees to bend over Nan as Eliot held the bottle to her nostrils.

"Alive?" he quavered in deep bass tremolo. "Did you say—Yes, yes! Look at her eyes!"

"Nan!" cried Eliot. "You're all right—say you're all right!"

She looked dazedly from him to the anxious lawyer.

"I—don't know," she whispered. "That woman—Miss Devore—talked me into letting her in. While she made believe to beg my pity, he crept up behind."

"Scoundrel!" denounced Judge Laton. "They made off—had opened the door again. I only winged the villain—"

"What does it matter?" said Eliot, his eyes on Nan. "Good riddance!"

The big lawyer darted a glance into the young man's face and heaved himself to his feet with sudden alacrity.

"They headed for your limousine. I shall telephone the police."

He padded out of the room with elephantine softness. Eliot did not lift his

glance. His eyes were gazing down into Nan's. He bent over to slip his arms about her and draw her up with her tousled red head upon his breast.

"Little wife," he murmured, "the judge has told me everything. I have been blind."

"She is very beautiful," whispered Nan.

"Beautiful! I saw her face when he was smothering you—her real face. Little wife, I am no longer blind! But first, about the estate. I shall accept your assignment to me. Then you will take from me not a fourth, but half."

"Oh, no, no! I—"

"Oh, yes, yes!" he mocked her, his lips quirked in their crooked smile. "The one condition is that each of us shall also give himself and herself to the other—for always!"

Nan shivered as if seized with a chill. "Please, Arthur, please don't joke. I—I only wanted you. Afterward I didn't want the fourth for myself. It was to be for—for him."

"Him?" demanded Eliot, taken aback.

His relaxing embrace enabled her to draw her head away from his breast so that she could look up into his troubled face. Her own face was rose-pink with a delicious blush, and her lips were parted in an adorable smile. Her gray eyes gazed up at him through a mist of blissful tenderness.

"You dear old stupid!" she whispered. "Don't you understand? I mean our—our child!"

(*The end.*)

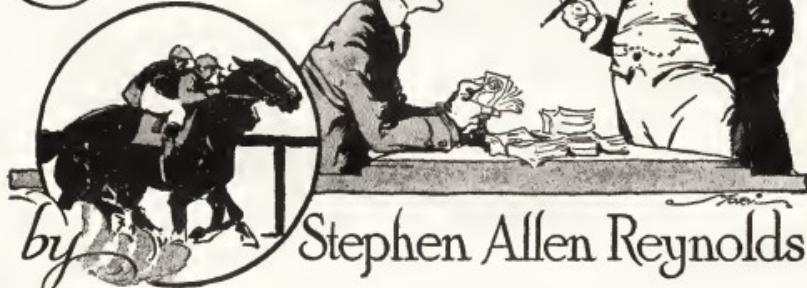


MORAL REFLECTION

BY J. E. MIDDLETON

HOW fair is Modesty, how bland,
And what restraint it oft induces,
When one, examining his hand,
Discovers but a pair of deuces!

An Eye for a Tooth



by Stephen Allen Reynolds

THE bidding was over; the sale at an end. Carnation Queen, stakes horse and winner of the last race of the day, impatient to be off to her stall, tossed her dainty head and pawed the scanty turf with first one white-stockinged forefoot and then the other. Meanwhile, Ready Money Kendrick, her new owner, gave his check for a cool three thousand, then turned with a satisfied smile to run his eyes over the heavy-flanks and glistening, brown back of his purchase.

The stand was emptying of its sea of straw hats as Kendrick bit deep into a thin plug of tobacco and nodded at the grinning negro standing just behind him. The black stable-hand stepped forward, fingering a new halter, and presently Carnation Queen danced away to join her new stable-mates.

His object accomplished, the grizzled racing veteran headed for the veranda of the clubhouse, intent on a cool drink and a long smoke. But a pompous in-

dividual immaculate in Palm Beach linen and costly Panama soon blocked his way.

"What are you going to do with the Queen, Mr. Kendrick?" he asked.

"Dunno. Maybe I'll race her here; maybe I'll ship her to Juarez." Kendrick's tone was gruff, his bearing far from gracious, for of all the tribe of touts and bookmakers that littered the metropolitan tracks, fat Sol Cramp appealed the least to him.

"You'll probably be able to pick up a good horse or two to-morrow. Tom Chatfield has to sell something, else be closed out. We cleaned him to-day," Cramp chuckled boastfully.

"So?" Kendrick's tone was even, though his fist tingled.

"Yep," the bookmaker nodded. "He had a nice bet down on his entry in the steeplechase, and the best horse, too. Too bad about the busted saddle-girth." Cramp's thin lips showed what might have been intended for a sympathetic smile.

"Dry-rot, or acid?" snapped the Kentuckian.

He waited for no reply, but pressed on to the clubhouse and joined a seated group of lingering members and owners.

The minutes fled. Wine flowed and good tobacco was burned as winners and losers discussed the events of the day, but Kendrick sat unmoved, his mind dwelling on days long past.

Again he saw in fancy two adjoining farms in the Blue Grass region, two boys with patched trousers and sunburnt feet and legs. Again he played truant with his chum, plunged into the brown waters of the old swimming hole, and rode bareback to fetch the cows.

"Damme for a stupid old fool!" he growled abruptly as his thoughts came back to the living present. For it occurred to him that Tom, Senior, had passed out, and that Tom, Junior, might welcome a helping hand in his hour of need.

Five minutes later found the old man at the stables, where he hunted up a well-built young fellow with level, gray eyes and a straw dangling from the corner of his wholesome mouth.

"Son," began Kendrick as he clapped the younger man on the shoulder, "I hear you're cuttin' down your string."

Tom Chatfield nodded gravely and pointed toward the tubful of bran-mash his man was stirring up.

"Feed costs money," he remarked. "I'm sellin' out Ripper and one other no-account. Got a note to meet shortly."

Kendrick understood. Furthermore, he knew Ripper for the unmanageable beast she was, always crashing against the rail immediately the back stretch was entered. A promising young mare showing phenomenal speed, she had degenerated into a crowder and rail-runner of the worst type, endangering not only her own life and limb at each entry, but also the limbs if not the lives of those who rode on and beside her.

"I'd like to look over that Ripper mare," Kendrick ventured after a few

moments of thought. An idea had occurred to him.

"Help yourself," said Tom with a wave of his hand toward the open door of the stable.

Leisurely he followed the elder horseman and watched with some curiosity the proceedings which ensued. For instead of examining the feet and legs of the outlaw, Kendrick contented himself with a survey of her teeth and eyes.

"She's the height and color o' that Carnation Queen mare I bid in to-day," pronounced Kendrick as he came forth from the stall wiping his hands on a wisp of straw.

"That's right," Chatfield agreed. "The pair might be sisters as far as color and looks are concerned."

A precautionary glance at the feed-mixer outside, and Kendrick drew close to Tom. "Mum's the word," he breathed, "and don't you dream o' partin' with Ripper. I'll help you meet that note, and 'fore long you'll have a bale o' money and won't have to worry about feed bills."

Chatfield stared, unbelieving, but as Kendrick went on speaking softly, pointing occasionally at Ripper, he began to understand that here, indeed, was a man who knew horses "with the saddles off."

For nearly half an hour Kendrick continued advising and instructing, and minute by minute Tom's heavy heart grew lighter. The stamping of the feet of his thoroughbreds, the swishing of their tails, was again music in his ears. For there was a way out of his financial difficulties—unless the bookmakers should learn of what he was about to do.

A fortnight passed, and if the bookmakers suspected that anything mysterious was afoot in the Chatfield stable they gave no sign. Odds against Ripper, entered one fair day in the fifth race, opened at 20 to 1, and with the heavy play on the favorites rose quickly to 40 to 1.

"I'll take a hundred o' that at forty,"

chuckled Kendrick as Sol Cramp gave him the price.

"Easy money," the bookmaker smiled as he noted the bet. But a few minutes later when he learned that five hundred dollars had been placed on the rail-runner in five other books, he looked grave.

Immediately Ripper's price was cut to 20, and closed at 10 to 1. Chatfield had half his bank balance on the brown mare at the top odds, while Ready Money Kendrick stood to win the price of a small farm.

The distance was a mile, the track fast, and although Ripper broke badly, she was abreast of the leader at the far turn and seemed to have overcome her old weakness for smashing into the rail. Neck and neck Ripper and the favorite flew down the stretch until the eighth pole was reached, when an observant onlooker, were he close enough, might have seen the iron fingers of the brown mare's jockey relax a trifle.

She responded and pressed forward, winning by half a length.

The sporting writers treated Ripper's performance as a non-explicable "reversal of form"; Chatfield, who trained his own string, received his share of congratulations and black looks, and Ready Money's negro halter-holder, known far and wide as "The Undertaker," got gloriously drunk on the proceeds of a two-dollar bet.

The bookmakers took their losses philosophically and made no audible complaint, but when three days later Ripper beat out a field of class and finished six furlongs in close to record time, questions were put to Kendrick which seemed to nettle him.

"Did you ever notice how much Carnation Queen looked like this reformed Ripper?" he was asked by a friend who winked as he spoke.

"What if the mares *do* look alike?" he returned uneasily yet defiantly.

"Heard you shipped Carnation Queen t' Juarez," put in "Hoppy" Holmes, a trainer who owed his nickname to a pro-

pensity for invariably settling his bar bills—a proceeding which always compelled him to "hop" his board bills.

Kendrick caught the sarcastic note in the utterance, and put on a bold front. "I *did*," he asserted loudly. "What of it?"

"Nothin' much," said Holmes softly. He snickered, then added: "Only some of us were a wonderin' if you shipped the right mare. Figurin', y' know, that the Queen and Ripper might 'a' got mixed—'tentional, o' course."

Kendrick hastened away from the grounds, and in the cool of the evening sought Chatfield in the old-fashioned hotel near the track.

"Come in," a voice bade him when he rapped on Tom's door.

He entered and found Ripper's owner seated at a small table. At least a dozen piles of banknotes were arranged in orderly fashion before him, and as Kendrick approached, Tom snapped a rubber band around a thick stack of tens, checked off the last of a column of figures and leaned back in his chair.

"Curious thing," he smiled up at the veteran, "but my winnings on the two races balance the sum the bookies took away from dad the year he died."

Kendrick clapped the younger man on the shoulder. "Now for a little interest," he proposed, "but if you don't grab it to-morrow you may never get it."

Chatfield looked thoughtful.

"We're the talk o' the track," Ready Money went on. "Sol Cramp looked hard at the mare's ankles this afternoon, and at least five Weisenheimers asked me how Carnation Queen was enjoyin' the weather in Juarez."

"Something's due to drop soon. I heard a plenty myself."

Kendrick's eyes sought the ceiling and he lost himself in thought. "Silver Shilling is our trouble to-morrow," he said presently. "She's the best at the distance, and unless I can get Treadwell to scratch her you'd best back the mare for the place."

"And then wait for the fireworks," grinned Tom.

"You said it, son; there 'll surely be somethin' doin' after the third race."

And there was, for after Treadwell had turned a deaf ear to Kendrick's suggestion that he accept an amount the size of the purse and withdraw Silver Shilling, there followed a race worth while.

The distance was a mile and a sixteenth; the Treadwell entry the favorite at even money. Odds against Ripper, now entered with five of the best stakes-horses in America, opened at 10 to 1, but were quickly cut to 4 to 1 in the face of the flood of Ripper money which seemed to pour in from all sides. When the bugle sounded, the odds had shortened to 7 to 5 in the few remaining books which would accept bets on the reformed rail-runner.

Both Silver Shilling and Ripper broke on their toes and flew around the near turn neck and neck, followed closely by Black Rock, the DuMont entry. Down the back stretch Black Rock slipped in on the rail and took the lead by half a length. To those in the stand it looked as if a blanket might cover the three leaders.

Tom Chatfield's chances looked slim for placing his mare as the three thundered down the home stretch and Silver Shilling gained slightly. But Ripper's jockey was a little man, full of resourceful energy. Leaning still further over the neck of his mount he urged her on with voice and hand.

The mare answered by putting forth the strength till then held in reserve. Her feet twinkled still faster, her speed increased perceptibly, and in the final drive she nosed past her rivals and finished a clean length in the lead.

But almost immediately the stand was in an uproar as the words flew from tongue to tongue: "All bets off; the winner's a ringer!" All eyes were turned to the number board and to the knot of excited and gesticulating men in front of the judges' stand.

"I protest!" Sol Cramp cried. "The horse that ran first is Carnation Queen with her white ankles painted over! Pull Ripper's number down! All bets off!"

"Hold on, Mr. Cramp," the judge broke in, "you're not running this track."

Calmly he went about his weighing in. That operation completed, he motioned to the number board man, and an instant later the red "official" bobbed up and the stand buzzed with excitement.

"It's robbery!" fairly screamed the bookmaker, "I'll prove it!"

Before any one could sense what he was about to do he fumbled in his pocket and produced a bottle. The pungent odor of ether arose as with moistened handkerchief Cramp approached the brown mare and stooped at her forefeet.

No one barred his way or offered objection. Chatfield, a sober expression on his usually cheerful face, stood by, and near him, watching every movement of the bookmaker, stood Ready Money Kendrick. There was a quizzical look on the veteran horseman's face as Cramp stood erect and shouted:

"There's the proof! See the paint?"

Sure enough, the handkerchief he held aloft was smeared with a brown stain, and the near pastern of the mare showed a light streak where the ether had taken effect.

For an instant Judge Martinson considered the advisability of rescinding his action, but as the thought recurred to him that a certain butcher had telephoned him from the city that he had placed a fifty-dollar bet on Ripper at 6 to 1, he stood pat. Knowing that the wager was half in his own interest, he declared firmly:

"All bets stand; but I shall investigate and punish if necessary."

He crooked his finger at two gray-uniformed track police standing near by. "Tie that mare up in the paddock," he bade them sternly. "Don't let her out of your sight, and don't allow anybody to meddle with her."

He was at a loss to know whether to

postpone the fourth race or whether to conduct the investigation after the last race, and was considering the point when Chatfield spoke up.

"Might I suggest, judge, that you get the New York Jockey Club offices on the long distance and have 'em give you the registered markings of both Carnation Queen and Ripper?"

It was a reasonable request, and Judge Martinson granted it. Sol Cramp fumed at the delay, but he was powerless to do more.

Both Chatfield and Kendrick seemed to take the matter coolly, and after the final race of the day had been run, joined the crowd in the paddock.

"I protest the result of the third race," Cramp began pompously as the judge and the stewards halted near the guarded mare. He held up the brown-stained handkerchief and concluded dramatically:

"This is the proof that Carnation Queen has been masquerading as Ripper. Her four white stockings have been daubed over with brown paint."

A murmur went around the paddock. The evidence seemed convincing, and here and there surprise was expressed that the guilty parties should take the matter so calmly.

"I demand that—"

"Shut up!" broke in Kendrick on Cramp's demand. He whirled on Judge Martinson. "What markin's did y' get on Carnation Queen?" he snapped.

"Solid brown, foaled in the spring of 1912, and with a white sock on each foot from fetlock to hoof," the judge quoted from memory.

"Right-o!" admitted Ready Money heartily. He waved a paper toward the judge. "Here's the bill-o-ladin' through to Juarez for that same lady hoss."

"And what markings did you get over the phone on *my* mare?" asked Chatfield at this juncture.

Judge Martinson looked up from the document he had taken from Kendrick. "Same description, practically — except

Ripper has but two white socks, both on his forefeet."

Every human eye in the paddock was turned upon Cramp as he knelt at the mare's hind heels and rubbed frantically at her ankles. But not so much as a tinge of color stained the white-handkerchief handed him by a fellow bookmaker.

"Look out!" warned Chatfield when he thought the farce had run long enough. He pointed at the flattened ears of the mare, who was gathering herself for a kick at the man who was so strangely freezing her hind pasterns.

Cramp got up without loss of time. The mare's hind ankles were naturally brown, he was satisfied of that, but he sensed that in some strange way he was being hoaxed.

"It seems that this animal *is* Ripper," the judge declared, "although for some unknown reason her owner saw fit to paint her front ankles brown."

He gazed sternly at Chatfield as he spoke. But Ready Money interrupted again. "That was by *my* advice," he said defiantly. "Iodin and glycerin paint beats fire-punchin' for osselets. You all know there's no law compellin' us to bandage over it with oiled silk. And none o' you seen Ripper runnin' without boots for such a spell back that you all plumb forgot that the mare had two white socks of her own."

"And there ain't no law or rule against mixing in a little burnt umber along with the iodin and other stuff," Chatfield supplemented with a grin. "It makes a more artistic job of matching, so to speak."

A roar of laughter ran around the paddock. It was growing late, but the crowd lingered, waiting to hear what iodin paint had to do with the regeneration of the worst rail-runner of modern times.

"How about the change of form?" some one asked.

"Simple as claimin' a foul in a five-furlong dash for two-year-olds," Kendrick answered. "It's our secret—Tom's and mine—and we don't have to tell, but

if Tom ain't got any objections I'm sure I ain't."

"Might 's well spill the beans," consented Ripper's owner, his fingers twisted in the mane of the animal that had brought him a small fortune.

"I knew," Kendrick began, "that with the sire and dam Ripper had she must have speed to burn and *then* some. So when I got to mullin' it over why she always bolted into the rail, it struck me that maybe the mare had a bad tooth, causin' her to bear away from the bit. I reasoned it out that a horse with a tender molar on the right side would bolt plumb off the track—'cept at Belmont, where they run with the sun—and that a sore one on the left side would make an animal shoot into the rail at the least touch o' the bit."

A murmur went around the paddock as the speaker paused and spat at a bumblebee buzzing lazily over the dust of a near-by box-stall. The insect dried itself and flew angrily away, whereupon Kendrick resumed:

"I was dead right about the tooth, for when I got a peep at Ripper and brought my good eye to bear on her mouth I spotted the cause of her rail-bumpin'. 'Twas a bad lower molar—the first one on the left side. So I had a long talk with Tom, and that same night we got old Doc MacCarthy to yank out the tooth that caused the trouble, and keep his mouth shut about it.

"And that's all, 'xcept after what Ripper did to-day I wouldn't be surprised to see Tom win the Suburban with her—painted or *unpainted*."



TRUTHS ETERNAL

BY WILLIAM E. CARSON

FASTEN not your hopes to branches, for the spread boughs,
When loosed by time's destroying blight, will fall decayed;
Fasten your hopes to the firm stem, for that will live,
Even when age wears out, and burdens drop from wearied hands.

Fasten your hopes, undaunted, to love, to truth, and faith,
Fearing not that time will fell the tree of life;
For time would turn from razing life's fair treasures,
Lest time itself should cease and be no more.

Fasten your hopes, with strength, to what love bears to life,
Fasten them to truth, for life is truth well told,
Fasten them to faith, for faith will bear up life;
Then, filled with inward peace, face life or death unmoved.

Fasten to-day's and to-morrow's hopes, cares, joys, and woes
To that which cannot change, which will forever last;
Faint not, but be strong in love, in truth, in faith,
And life shall be far more than worth its hopes and fears.

Lilac and Lucia



N

by Howard Philip Rhoades

YOU may recall, if you have carefully studied your mythology, that a group of young maidens who found Jupiter sleeping, after a hard game of golf, dropped about his head clusters of Burbank's improved narcissuses. Awakened by the sweet smell, the god arose, peering into the foliage to see whence the flowers had come. About the time he spied the maidens—clad in the regulation American school spring lawn festival costume—there smote upon his nose a more poignant odor.

Casting aside his godly dignity, Jupiter called, "Have a nectar on me at the fountain, girls; I've got to beat it up the mountain!" Then he flew away home, where Juno had put on the fragrant evening pot of steaming ambrosia. Doubtless you now recall the incident. At all events, this story simply had to have a Greek reference.

With the key-note of perfumery struck, it only remains to set the stage with Thomas Tom, Hank Hicks, and the Crystal Café.

The Crystal Café so completely belied its name that not even the reason for its being seemed clear. It was a place where the presence of things drab, worn, and soiled seemed to indicate low prices, as the absence of such things is likely to



indicate high ones. Because the kitchen at the rear was only separated by a curtained door; because there was a lunch-counter up one side, and paper napkins; because the table-cloths were stained into cubist pictures; but most of all because there was a large sign, "Meals Twenty-five Cents," Thomas Tom was in the place. The pinch of late October found Mr. Tom a young man with thinning shoes, frayed clothing, a hungry look, and sad eyes. He was like a bee which had buzzed all summer in search of some sweet-honeyed flower, with no thought of the winter to come. And, young man of potentialities that he was, that is just what he had done.

Mr. Tom's depression was not too dire to prohibit sensitiveness, however, and when another man waived all the vacant tables in the line to sit down opposite him he was irritated. The greater popularity of other restaurants had made Mr. Tom the only table diner at the Crystal Café, and he had been glad of it, for he wanted to be alone.

"If you don't mind—" apologized the newcomer as he plumped down into the chair. He was thick, close to fifty, be-spectacled, and his rough clothes did not fit in with his well-nourished person.

"I'm incog—sort of Harun-al-Raschid—

ing it," he imparted. "Fellows in stories do that to fool the world. I do it to fool my family. Fellows in books dress up like bums to study sociology. I do it to get a decent meal! Once a month I want human victuals, not hashed over by a French chef, and handed down by a bulldog-faced butler. What you eating?"

"I had thought of steak and onions," said Tom with interest. His irritation against the man had diminished. "What are you going to have?"

"Where's the waiter?" demanded the elder man. "Here, Bill—gad, he's lucky never to be called a garsong—give us service!"

Angel Archangelopolis—he is our true reason for the Greek reference—came more slowly than usual. In his store-box of a restaurant he was not used to be ordered around by sober men.

"How are your liver and onions, sauerkraut and pig's feet, bologna, Limburger—"

"V'heff no cuk," ventured Angel.

"Well," cried the other, "what are you going to do about it?"

"I heff telephone the agency. One is on way," Angel explained.

"Hurry it up!" admonished the thick-built diner, "or I'll go back where they not only mistreat grub, but smuggle it in under dago names. My friend here wants steak and onions. Give me short ribs and sauerkraut. We both want some pie and cheese and—"

"No dessert for me, please," said Mr. Tom, in whose pocket reposed a lonesome quarter.

"What yuh say?" growled the other man. "Yes, you do. Young man, tonight you're dining with Hank Hicks."

"Indeed," remarked Mr. Tom, just to be saying something.

"My card," said Mr. Hicks, and passed over a perfumed bit of cardboard inscribed: "Mr. Henri Hickstead."

"Pleased to meet you, Mr. Hickstead," said Mr. Tom.

"Hickstead!" the other cried. "Gimme that card. Matter of habit I passed it.

Only good thing about it's the perfume it's dipped in. Hickstead—bah!—and they call me 'Henri'—get that—Ohnery —what did I ever do? Hickstead's the idea of that administrative and efficiency expert I've hired. He claims the 'tead' addition is worth half a million a year on a psychological basis. Henri Hickstead, née Hicks, that's me. I was born in a cabin like Abe Lincoln, and worked as hard as him to get my start. Only difference between me and Abe is, Abe did something worth while, and I just made money. Hey, Bill, don't burn that kraut. If there's one thing I hate— Yes, sir, Hank Hicks was my name before I got into smells and millions!"

"Smells?" Mr. Tom questioned.

"Perfumery—I make it by the barrel. Caprice, flower of fair France, violet, breath of the spring woods—this is bunk my advertising agent springs—lilac, love's young dream—"

"Mr. Hicks," interrupted Mr. Tom excitedly, "maybe your firm made some lilac that I—"

"Likely we did," said Mr. Hicks. "The manager of our sales department estimates that our yearly product would make a smell ten feet high and fifteen wide, which would reach three times around the globe. Do you use perfume?"

"Not now. I'm lucky to get a handout."

He sighed and looked away through the dingy show window, enlivened only by a few bottles of pop and a poster advertising a long-past outing of the ice-handlers' union. His silence and depression seemed to bring to the mind of his companion unpleasant thoughts. With an impatient movement the perfume manufacturer slapped the table and swore fiercely.

"Why did I get to talking shop?" he lamented. "It's enough to spoil my evening. No, no, not your fault. It came to my mind naturally enough. You bet I can't forget. Making sweet odors is the bitterest business in the world. Every year the drummers give away more of our

stock to waitresses. Often a Hungarian laborer will fall into a vat of perfume, and there's a dead loss. To cap things, this morning I lost my best perfume-smeller!"

"I—I don't quite understand," said Mr. Tom.

"Nothing to understand. He just quit. Goes to the municipal garbage disposal plant—head sorter, identifier of conglomerates, you know. It'll cripple me bad."

"You mean," said Mr. Tom, "that men are paid for ability to identify perfumes?"

"Why not? You've heard of tea-tasters. Determining, for instance, which is a Roman hyacinth perfume, and which is just a plain wop one, might mean a difference of a thousand dollars on a small quantity. Labels are added last at the factory, and you've got to have a man with a post-graduate nose."

"Then there's trade efficiency. This man personally investigated the shop-girl, grass widow, and charming barber fields, learning what each used by being a nose-witness. I've known him to stand in the lee of three tar-boilers on the same street, and tell me what sort of a sachet was carried by a lady on the other side of them!"

"Remarkable!" declared Mr. Tom. "And more so that I should talk to you about perfume, when it has had such a part in my lamentable experiences."

"Gypped by them cut-rate dealers," observed Mr. Hicks. "They're a low-lived gang!"

"No," said Mr. Tom sadly; "my experiences were with perfume and a lady."

"That's interesting," said Mr. Hicks. "I was about to ask for your story. I thought we could have it with grub. Here, Bill, how's them orders?"

"I forgot tell-a you," apologized Angel. "The cuk a-come. Your order is a-start."

"Good! While we wait, give us two pops. Dark and light—the burgundy and

champagne of the lunch-counter. How I used to hog that stuff at the old county fair. I never get anything as harmless to drink at home, I assure you!"

After Angel had set before them two glasses of the bubbling puerile drink, Mr. Hicks proceeded: "Now, let's hear from you."

"To begin with," related his companion, "my name is Thomas Tom. Tom Tom they called me back in Snake Creek County, and my cousin, Abner Boggs—he ran away with a circus, now in vaudeville under the name of Julian St. Bourbon—always said that a fellow with a name like that was due for a beating. Fate and the movies have given it to me. I graduated from a centralized school, where they taught the stay-on-the-farm idea, and I determined to enter a life of honest toil raising the cost of living on the city man. I went to live with and work for Mr. Jake Sharp. I fell in love with his daughter, Lucia Sharp. Lucia and I went to spelling bees and corn shuckings (revived under the direction of the State Board of Agriculture), and riding home of nights she would lay that pretty head on my shoulder—ah, she was a girl!"

He halted, his eyes bright and not without trace of moisture.

"Lucia had all that domestic science and make-the-farm-more-livable stuff at her finger-tips. She could sweep like a vacuum cleaner and cook like you think your mother used to. From the fashion-books she got clothes ideas that made fade-awayes of the best-dressed girls at the county seat.

"She was a beautiful sort of tow-head, with red and gold sprinkled on, and when she danced, or walked, or hopped a fence she went like a chipmunk, she was that graceful. She was blue-eyed and live as a bird, Mr. Hicks, and I loved her—awful."

He stopped, and Mr. Hicks felt he was about to come to a less pleasant part. After a moment he went on:

"We were all but engaged. She

wouldn't give me a direct answer, but I was waiting, sure that in time she would. Then she got so she wouldn't talk of marriage. She was silent and discontented. I couldn't get out of her what was the matter until one day she said, 'Tommy, I've kept track of the picture shows I've seen'—we went to maybe one or two a week in town—'and in nine out of ten of them a country girl went to the city and became famous. In the tenth she married an earl.'

"That was because the regular scenario editor was sick one day,' I told her. Then I looked at her and said, 'Lucia, have you caught the fever that got Bob Welch and Lizzy Ames?'

"'I ain't got no fever,' she says, 'only I'm sick and tired of this little old nothing of a place. Not a high building, not a theater, not a café—'

"'Um-hum,' I said, 'You better talk to the deacon, Lucia. You're in danger. You know what become of Bob Welch, don't you? He ran away to the city, and become a street car conductor. The place where his brains ought to have been got beat out in a strike. As for Lizzy Ames, she became a milliner—and paints!'

"We had a quarrel and we weren't ever the same afterwards. She didn't speak of the city again. I remember the night before she left. We were sitting on the steps of the porch at her home, when I got up to go. I drew her over the lawn a bit where there was a small forest of lilacs, throwing their perfume on every side. Lilac always had been her favorite perfume, and her neck and hair, right in the place where I used to steal my best kisses always smelled of it. Here we had it both ways, the stored-up-in-a-bottle kind, and the natural. I kissed her, and she kissed me, more warmly than usual, now that I look back on it. That's why I think she'd have me, if I'd find her. She left early in the morning, without a word to me. I've been hunting her ever since."

His face, which had brightened as he spoke of kissing Lucia once more grew dull and sad, as Mr. Tom went on: "I

had a little money when I came to the city, and did nothing but hunt. Then I had to get money to live on. When I'd get a little ahead, I'd blow my job, and spend all my time in hunting. I wouldn't spend money for clothing—I begrimed it—and my suit has got so bad I can't get much besides common labor. I don't even look well enough to get a job driving a truck, or be a shipping-clerk. Outside of my board I've only spent money on one thing. I've kept a bottle of lilac perfume in my room. Evenings when I was real discouraged, I'd dab some on my handkerchief, and then lay back in my chair. I'd put the handkerchief over my face, and then try to doze, and dream I was back at the lilac bushes, with Lucia in my arms.

"She's here somewhere, Mr. Hicks. Her sister writes me every week she hasn't come home. I'm certain she's too strong for city life to ever go to a smaller place. Furthermore she'd stick here to the end of time rather than to go back and admit she was wrong about the city. I'll see her some day, riding down the avenue all in silks, and so fine I won't dare even speak to her. She'll belong to another man. Men simply can't help loving her!"

The pause this time was longer, and Mr. Hicks queried: "What are your plans?"

"I'll stay here and continue to look," said Tom. "Maybe I'll be fortunate enough to find her before some other fellow does. I won't go back to the country for the country's sake. The city isn't bad. The people here won't do you any harm—if you watch them. I can get jobs enough, if I can manage to get some new clothes, and I can hold them, if I can keep my mind on them. But one thing bothers me. I'm broke and my bottle of perfume's empty. It was such a help. To-night I was so discouraged I felt I'd just have to have some lilac perfume. I had fifty cents. So I decided to spend half on a shave with lilac, and half on supper. I got into the chair and began to dream of Lucia. The barber said something, and I —thinking of her—said 'Yes.' The ivory-

dome slaps on rose water! What could I say?"

"We can fix you," said Hicks. "I need a night watchman at the plant. You could sleep in the lilac room. You'd have to sleep somewhere, you know. All night watchmen do."

"I wouldn't know how to thank you, Mr. Hicks. Honestly, it may sound strange, but I am sincere on this lilac matter. Whenever I inhale the sweet odor of that delightful flower, I am nearer my little lost sweetheart. When its dear odor comes through my nostrils, seeming to penetrate my very soul, a wonderful happiness—it is heaven—comes over me. If I never find her, Mr. Hicks, I shall always sniff lilac, and remember her. Lilac and she are inseparable. That unseen tie—that delectable fragrance—is the most potent thing which holds me to her, and to her memory. If I ever find her it shall be through it. Lilac and Lucia!"

He sank back into his chair, a look of glorifying reminiscence upon his face. Hicks sat there, silent in respect. He was touched at the devotion of this stripling to a girl to whom he was bound by such a romantic and unusual tie. It was something ethereal, something from an elevated plane, something one does not meet in the prosaic every-day world.

He looked at the thin, spiritual face before him, flushed and earnest after this soul-felt speech. Then, as he watched, a strange light came into the eyes of Mr. Tom. A faint breath was moving through the place. Some one at the back, perhaps, had opened the outer door, allowing

the air to move forward. Thomas Tom leaned toward the breath like a person in a dream. His nostrils were expanded, his eyes were brightening. His whole being was drawing into an attitude of expectancy. Hicks watched, spellbound.

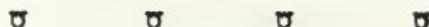
Then Thomas Tom rose, slowly, steadily, like one impelled by a hypnotist. Nose first, he stepped with a deliberate, almost mechanical, stride, toward the kitchen. He paid no attention to Mr. Hicks, none to the bent figure or two at the counter, none to Angel Archangelopolis, whom he met at the door. Toward the kitchen he went, with quickening step. Faster—He ran—he leaped through the door!

There was a sharp feminine shriek, and a hissing sound, like some one had spilled hot grease on a stove. Hank Hicks, no longer immobile, was at the heels of Thomas Tom. Passing through the door he saw a wondrous sight.

In the arms of Thomas Tom was a slender girl. Upon his shoulder was a golden head, flame-sprinkled. Mr. Tom was squeezing hard, and the girl in his arms was snuggling close.

Some time passed. Then Mr. Tom saw Mr. Hicks, and said: "Did you notice the odor of that steak and onions, Mr. Hicks? I knew who was beside the skillet, the moment I caught a whiff. Nobody can fry steak and onions like my Lucy!"

"Mr. Tom," said Mr. Hicks, in the tones of business, "My head perfume smeller, who just left, drew fifty dollars a week. Would you care to sign a year's contract at the same rate?"



FAILURE?

BY OLIN LYMAN

FAILURE, the pessimist's decay;
The stout heart's optimistic word:
"To-morrow is another day";
Failure is but success deferred.

The Crack of the Whip,



by

Octavus Roy Cohen

I WILL admit that the Kid broke it to me gently. He slid into the room, shut the door, and blushed. Then he asked me if he mightn't have two hundred and fifty dollars.

"Two hundred and fifty dollars!" I gasped. "Why, Kid, that's a heap of money to have all at once."

"I know it," he counters.

"What you want with it?"

"Spend," he came back evasively.

"On what?"

He blushed again and fidgeted from one foot to the other.

"Nawthin' special. Jus' a diamond!"

I got slowly out of my chair, crossed the room, took the Kid by both shoulders, and shook him.

"For yourself?" I asked sternly.

"Nope."

"Kid—you've run foul of a skirt!"

The muscles of his shoulder rippled under my hands and he met my eyes squarely.

"I sure have," he affirmed. "Oh! chee, Mr. Joe, just wait 'll you meet her. She's the grandest dame. An'-well, I guess I should 've told you before, but it seemed kinder funny me having to run to you before I'd ever said a thing to her."

"That's all right, Kid. I'll manage

your fights—not your love affairs. What's her monniker?"

"Rose La Belle."

"Huh?"

"Rose La Belle."

"You mean that?"

"Mean it? Sure I mean it. Whatcha think I'd kid you for? An' she's as pretty as her name."

Whether it was the woman's name, with its trade-mark of the chorus, or whether it was a hint of antagonism in the Kid's manner—a sort of strategic defense—I don't know. At any rate, I frowned a bit, and then:

"When did you meet her?"

His eyes dropped.

"Last Friday night."

"Hmph! Eight days' acquaintance, and buying her a piece of ice already, eh? Good progress, I call it. Kind of rushed her off her feet, huh? Love at first sight?"

"I guess that's it," stammered the Kid in answer.

"And of course your bein' lightweight chameen of the world, and having a fat bank-roll, didn't affect her none? She loves you for yourself alone?"

Innocently the Kid met my gaze once more.

"Yep."

"You sure?"

"Cert. Why—*she says so!*"

That's the Kid all over. Honest, if some grifter told him politics was straight he'd swallow it. He's the most trusting lad I had ever seen. I found that out before I started managing him; in fact, it was the how of our getting together. Y' see, in them days I was doing newspaper work.

I ain't never been much on the flowery word stuff, but I know a thing or two about the prize-ring, and they had me covering the big fights for them. I'd hustle back to the office after a scrap and tell a rewrite man how it all happened, and then he'd whip it into shape so's the public could read it intelligent like, and my name would be stuck over the top.

One night this here Kid Riley fought a scheduled ten-round battle with Battling Roberts, the ex-champion, and finished him in the ten rounds. It was at the Southside Athletic Club, where all his other fights had been, and me being in with the officials there just happened to drift around when they were paying off. I saw them slip the Kid fifty as his share.

At that time I didn't think the Kid was a world-beater, but I imagined that he got at least two hundred and fifty for a ten-round bout, and I called him aside and asked him about it.

That boob explains that he'd made his start at the Southside, and that even after he got into the finals class the manager had explained to him that he owed a debt of gratitude to the club, and so he oughtn't to ask more than fifty. Besides, said that bully, the Kid oughtn't to fight nowhere else. Honest, it didn't seem possible that a guy could be as ignorant as him.

"You need a manager," I says, "the worst way. I'll act on a fifty-fifty basis if you want. But, Kid—I'll have to be your guardeen, too. You let me arrange your fights and handle your money—and I'll make you rich. You're young (he

was then just turned twenty) and you've got the stuff. Maybe I can make you champeen some day."

So I get a lawyer chap to draw up the articles, and the Kid and me affixes our scrawls—and the deal is closed. Right about then the Kid's stock has been boosted about a million per cent by beating Battling Roberts, and the manager of the Southside comes along and wants to match him with One-Round Maloney.

According to our written agreement, the Kid turns the manager over to me. The mogul allows he wants the Kid to go on for ten rounds against Maloney, and I says sure I'll let him do it.

"That's fine," enthuses the manager, producing a contract. "Ten rounds, and he'll get fifty, win, lose, or draw."

I pretended to be surprised.

"I guess I didn't get you right," I says. "You mean *two hundred* and fifty!"

The long and short of it was that the Kid went on and won by a knockout in the sixth round, and pulled his two-fifty. He almost croaked when he knew how much he had coming to him, and I stuck it in the bank for him—I having made that lawyer guy put things through the courts which made me trustee for the Kid's kale.

I won't bore you with sperfluous (I ain't got a dictionary handy, and don't know if that's the way sperfluous is spelled; but it's pronounced that way and ought to) details; but the long and short of it was that less 'n two years later the Kid finished Eddie Franklin out on the coast, and when they put his picture in the papers next day they had a head-line which said he was light-weight champeen of the world.

The best part of it was that we all knew he wasn't no fluke champ. True, he didn't have the cleverness of Packy MacFarland nor the punch of Joe Wollcott, nor the speed of Young Ahearn; but when it came to all-round scrapping he was there with the best of them. Of course, right after he won the title he

went on a vaudeville tour and got away with quite a bit of soft coin, and then it was the Kid who come to me and allowed that he wanted to get back into harness again.

So back to the big burg we go, and I fits up accommodations for him at a road-house in Westchester, and hire him a string of sparring partners, and he gets into trim right fast while managers fall all over each other to match him up.

But being champ didn't turn the Kid's head none whatever. B'lieve me he was the modestest thing I ever run across. I sort of got to imagine him a regular schoolboy until he come to me for the two and a half centuries to buy a doll the sign of submission.

I didn't have the slightest objection to the Kid getting married—I was glad of it, in fact. The right girl sort of acts as an anchor to a man who has more money than he knows what to do with, especially if the bright lights ever get his nanny. So I come across with his two-fifty, but I allows that I'd like to give Rose La Belle the once-over.

The Kid beams like a day in June, and insists on taking me pronto down to the hotel where she is stopping. Knowing a thing or two about women whose names are similar in sound to Rose La Belle, I suggest that he call her first and let her know we're going to drop in—which suggestion he takes and tells me she says she'll be delighted.

Two hours later the bellhop tells us we're to come on up, and up we go, and into the suite of rooms consisting of bedroom, parlor and bath which Miss La Belle occupies. The Kid goes in first, proud as a boy scout on parade, and the girl rises to the occasion, as it were. I close the door and the Kid turns like he was presenting me at court.

"Mister Joe," he says tremulously, "meet Miss La Belle, my future intended."

She slipped me five fishlike fingers and raised her drooping baby-blue eyes to mine. Maybe they fooled the Kid but

they didn't fool me none whatever. And she knew it, and into them there came a flash of fire, a sort of challenge—as much as to say: "Mebbe you're his manager, but I've got the inside track and I'm gonna keep it." And when I got right close to her I seen that the golden hair of her was dark brown at the roots.

To myself I groaned and remarked something about the Kid being up against it. To her, I says that I was delighted to meet her and knew that her and I was gonna be the best of friends. She counters in the same strain—but believe me, there was a declaration of war right there—and for the first time I sympathized with them Russians who didn't have enough munitions. She had a clove hitch on the Kid, and knowing his innocence as I did, I wasn't wondering at it none whatever.

I stayed for about an hour and in the course of the conversation found that Miss La Belle had been in "the profession." Closer questioning wised me up that she had been a chorus lady, first on the road then in the Follies. She had the looks all right. Born with most of them and the rest cultivated—like the blond hair and the nice-looking eyebrows and the color in her cheeks.

Eventually we break away and the Kid allows that as soon as he finishes his scrap with Tommy Buck three weeks from then he's gonna get married and take a honeymoon trip on the two thousand and five hundred dollars that's gonna be handed him as a honorarium. Of course I get one thousand and two hundred and fifty dollars of that, but the balance is enough even for her honeymoon, I'm thinking.

I'm too wise to buck the Kid, especially when I see that the Indian sign the spider had on the fly ain't a circumstance to what this dame has on him, but during the training I get in a little of the inside stuff, trying to make the Kid see that Rose La Belle ain't the genuine stuff, but I might as well have tried to make Bill Bryan believe that war ain't hell.

The fight comes off in the Garden with reserved seats withdrawn from the market

account of the demand and rafter room selling at a premium. And what the Kid does to Buck is a plenty. There wasn't a man in the place who ever called him a cheese champ after that bout. No, he didn't finish Buck, but I don't believe any man ever took such a lacing since Carl Morris was cut into chop-meat by Jim Flynn in the same ring.

Then came the marriage ceremony: about as quiet as a St. Patrick's day parade. But everybody agreed that Rose La Belle looked queenly—which was all that the Kid needed to make him more than perfectly happy.

As there hadn't been no reg'lar invitation, Rose had announcement cards printed, and some "at homes" which announced that Mr. and Mrs. Patrick La Belle-Riley (some monniker, eh?) would be at home at number so-and-so Riverside Drive, at such-and-such a date. She was after the style, that chicken was.

And when we was throwing rice and shoes and bidding 'em good-by after a swell feed at a Broadway hash-house, I shook with Rose once more. This time she didn't try to hide the dislike she had for me—and I knew then that the war had started.

When they got back from their honeymoon two weeks later I knew that it had done a darned sight more than started. That skirt had already influenced the Kid against me. Not that he realized it—he was too bloomin' innocent—but first thing he did was to come at me about the guardianship and holding his money. Sheepish he was—like he didn't have the right to ask me.

"An' y' see," he winds up, getting courage by the route he'd gone, "it seems silly that a married man has to go to another guy for a hand-out when he's earned the money. It's mine, ain't it?"

"Yes, it's yours, Kid. What's the rub? Ain't our plan always worked? Don't you know where every dollar is? Have I ever handed out less 'n you wanted?"

"Tain't that," he retorted with a sort of harassed look. "It's—ah! th' devil!

Mister Joe, Rosie just don't like it, and what she says goes—see?"

Of course, as far as that guardianship paper went I had the Kid dead to rights, but I tore it up and made an accounting and forked over the coin and then sat back to watch results. I saw 'em two days later when the Kid buys a limousine: a great, big husk of a car it was with a shiny black body and a vase for orchids, and a chauffeur. Rose La Belle-Riley was going to live—and live high.

I stood for a month-long honeymoon, and then I dropped in on them one night in their Riverside Drive apartment. Her and Kid were going to it hammer and tongs. The Kid, simple guy that he is, invites me in right in the middle of the mix-up, and appeals to me—like he'd always used to do before that female woman butted in.

"Some of her swell sassietty friends comin' up here to-night," pipes the Kid desperately, "an' Rosie—"

"I told you not to call me Rosie," she snaps angrily. "My name is Rose."

"—an' Rose says I gotta doll all up in an open-face suit. It's rotten stuff. I'd rather wear fightin' trunks—"

"And you'd look better in them," she spouts once more.

"He sure would," I says calmly.

"That's his type," she comes back, quick as a gatlin'.

"It is. It is the type that made him champion of the world and caused you to marry him, and pays for this fancy apartment and that big limousine and those diamonds you're exhibiting. Yeh, I reckon he does look better in fighting togs than in anything else. That's what I dropped down to see him about. I want him to put 'em on again."

"And I suppose," she says bitterly, "that you wanna get hold of his money again. The very idee of you taking half the money he made when all you did was to sit back—and he did all the fightin'. Robbery I call it!"

The Kid had been playing safe and neutral up to that time, but at that his

face flamed and he took a hand in the game.

"Cut that, Rosie," he says harshly, more harshly than I'd ever heard him speak. "I won't stand for you—"

"Whoa, Kid!" I advises quietly. "This is her house, and she can be as much of a lady as she likes in it. If she don't like me, and insists on callin' me harsh names, the best thing I can do is to get out. But before I go I'll say one thing, Kid. It's this—I ain't been doin' no gumshoe work since you got married, but I happen to know that 1 G.M. has been early for you to hit the hay, and that once or twice you've tasted a sip of champagne, and that you ain't been training a darned bit; and I know, Kid, that it don't take a hell of a lot—beggin' your pardon, Mis' Riley—to put a champ on the blink. What I'd advise, Kid, is that you can this sassietty stuff. Let the wife do it if she wants; but you cut the smoke and the fizz-water, tie yourself down to the hay from 9 P.M. to 5 A.M. Do ten or fifteen miles on the road, and get back into trim. There's many a guy gunnin' for your scalp."

Then I beat it. The Kid follows me into the street and clutches my arm appealingly.

"Say, Mr. Joe," he pleads, "you don't think harsh of me for what happened up there, do you?"

"No, Kid," I laughs; "I don't feel sore at you for nothin'. But I will say that, while I ain't hankering on comin' between a man an' his wife, that it ain't no go, Kid. You'll get soft in three months; you'll lose your eye and your judgment of distance; your stamina and wind will be broken. A fighter, Kid, works at his business all the time. Trainin' has to be done, and done regular. Lemme know, Kid, when you're comin' back out to Westchester. Meanwhile I'll lay low and say nothin'."

About two weeks later the Kid comes along and announces he's ready to train for another scrap. I worked him out and put him through a course of sprouts, and in a few weeks I allowed that he was good

enough to sign up for ten rounds with Battling Larey. The Battler is a wader-in, and a fighter from the gong.

The Kid trained hard. But on the night of the fight Con Kennedy cornered me and says, low and easy:

"Joe," he says, "I'm just askin' friendly like—you ain't betting much on the Kid, are you?"

"Why?" I asks.

"Answer me first."

If it had been any other man than Con Kennedy I'd have been suspicious of them questions, but me and Con have grown up together. I'd trust him with my last dollar if he needed a square meal and didn't have a job in sight.

"Yes, I'mbettin' kinder heavy. I'm giving two to one on Bob Edgren's decision."

"Uh-huh." He frowns a bit. "An' I suppose yourbettin' one to two that the Kid will win by a knockout?"

"One to three," I amends. "Why all this quiz?"

"What time has the Kid been going to bed at nights?"

"Nine o'clock."

He sort of grins at that.

"You're soft, Joe; plumb spongy. Three nights this week I've seen the Kid and that peroxid dame of his out after 1 A.M."

"You've seen them yourself?"

"You got me."

I didn't ask no more questions, because I knew Con, and I knew he was a careful guy and a foolishly truthful one. But it was a shock—the Kid had lied to me for the first time. I guess I wasn't none too enthusiastic when I pushed him into the ring and prepared towels and ammonia and water and lemon for the commencement of the fight. Battling Larey would have been pie ordinarily, but if the Kid hadn't been keeping in trim—

They got together in the first round, and the fur certainly flew for three minutes. I wondered then why it was that the Kid didn't feel him out for a round or two. But no! He stood toe to toe and swapped

wallop. Of course, it was the kind of stuff the spectators go wild about, and they were standing on their seats pounding one another on the back, and howling like a bunch of Comanches on the warpath for scalps.

But when the Kid come to his corner at the end of the first round I understood, and knew for a certainty that Con Kennedy hadn't been exaggerating about the Kid's late hours. The Kid was breathing like a porpoise.

I didn't say a word, but the Kid caught my eye and he knew I'd noticed. And with the beginning of the second round he waded in again, just like a streak of lightning. And gradually, as they mixed, the Kid began breaking ground. Once I heard him grunt as a hard one whipped to his midriff. Then—

The Kid backed, covered—uncovered—and his right swished wildly through the air. It landed plumb on the vulnerable point at the side of Larey's jaw, and the challenger sprawled on the canvass—knocked-out cold.

Of course everybody went wild, and I collected my bets, and the papers went crazy and said the Kid was the greatest of all lightweight kings; but I wasn't fooled. I knew that the finishing punch had been a lucky one, and I knew that the Kid had been on the verge of defeat. On form, he couldn't have lasted seven rounds the way they were going.

I don't think I need to say that La Belle-what's-her-name made capital out of that win. The Kid pulled down fifteen hundred for that four minutes of scrapping, and Rose put it to him that he didn't need no training more'n just a couple of weeks before a battle.

Then, to make matters worse, her old theatrical enthusiasm cropped up once more. You've met 'em, haven't you—these leggy broilers who think they have Bernhardt backed off the map and that nothin's good enough for them but Shakespeare or Broadhurst or one of them big playwrights? Rose was that, and then some. The long and short of it was that

she arranges a vaudeville engagement with the billing of—

KID RILEY,
Peerless Lightweight Champion of the World
assisted by the famous
ROSE LA BELLE
Premiere Danseuse.

I didn't say a word to the Kid about bein' his manager, and he sort of steered clear of the subject when he was around me. And, of course, when they went on the road for their twenty-eight weeks, I knew blamed well that I'd never see a cent of the money they raked in.

What's the use? Twenty-eight weeks is mighty close to seven months. So I'll skip that seven months— And the Kid came back to me fifteen pounds over weight, flabby (for a prize-fighter), a bit bloodshot; and he announced that he was ready to go into training again.

Honest, I wanted to cry. If it had been any one but the boob of an unsophisticated Kid, I'd have handed him one and consigned him down below. But not the Kid. Why, I don't think he really had finished teething yet, he was that innocent. Fighting was the only thing he tackled where he didn't need a guardian—and he did that by instinct, I guess.

It seems that there was a reason for the Kid coming to me at that time. Eddie Lonegan, a Pacific Coast lightweight, had cleaned up everything out there that bore the stamp of class, and had invaded the East. What he had done to the high-class crop of lightweights was a sin and a shame. And one fact stood out starkly—he was the one lightweight who was in a position to *demand* a chance at the title. When Eddie challenged, it was strictly up to the Kid to accept.

So we signed new managerial articles, and I started him training. There ain't no use going into the details; but the Kid was all in. He still had the stuff, but it looked as though it was gonna be a year or so before he'd be in trim for a hard fight with a man of Lonegan's character.

Managers all over the country started bidding for the fight. The Kid was offered six thousand for his share of a ten-round battle. I was for taking it, but the Kid refused.

"Carey, out on the coast, offers twelve thousand for a twenty-round bout," he says. "I need the money."

"He'll wear you out, Kid," I pleaded. "He'll stay away from you for eight or ten rounds, and then he'll start in. You'll be a gonner—"

"Aw, say, Mr. Joe," countered the Kid; "you just don't understand. I gotta have the money. Just *gotta*, that's all. It's twelve thousand—"

I battled with the Kid for a month. I begged with him and pleaded with him and argued with him. Nothing doing. He was adamant.

A funny little thing happened a few days before the signing of articles. The Kid came to me looking kind of strange, and, like the Kid, let straight from the shoulder.

"Say," he says abruptly, "Eddie Lonegan knows my wife."

"Is that so?" I asks politely.

"Yeh. I seen them in my limousine just now. Funny, ain't it, that I should gonna be fightin' him soon?"

I agreed that it was very funny, and then shifted the conversation into other channels.

Well, Rose La Belle kept on cracking the whip, and the Kid kept on doing the tricks she wanted. Old Cleopatra wasn't an amateur night possibility compared with that blond dame of the Kid's. She had latched onto the Kid for what she could get out of him, and she was clever enough to see that he stayed very, very much in love with her.

But this time she cracked once too often. The fight with Eddie Lonegan was a worse farce than the notorious Johnson-Jeffries argument out Reno way. The Kid didn't have a chance from the gong. Eddie just played back and laughed at him, and jabbed and jabbed and jabbed. It was sickening. The Kid was gore all

over, and gameness helped him out until the fourteenth round. Then he started going down. Once in the fourteenth, three times in the fifteenth, six times in the sixteenth he went down for the count. In the seventeenth it was all over, and Eddie Lonegan was lightweight champion of the world.

The Kid was all broken up. I went back east with him, and didn't see him for three days. Then he come to me looking miserable enough to cry. He doesn't say a word, but sticks a legal paper into my mitt.

One look shows me that it's a suit for divorce, instituted by Rose against the Kid, and charging cruelty and incompatibility!

No, the Kid didn't fight it. It went through flying, and the Kid was soaked for heavy alimony. And as though that wasn't enough—less'n a month after the divorce Rose La Belle marries Eddie Lonegan, lightweight champion of the world.

That's where the Kid hit the road to hell!

There wasn't no use trying to do a thing with him. It's just that way with a man when a woman's pulled the Delilah stuff on him. He starts for the bottom, and he gets there in record time. It was pathetic—it was worse than that. And it seems that she'd just held them papers back long enough to have that twelve thousand the Kid got for losing to Eddie Lonegan put in her name at the bank.

There was the Kid, as close to broke as a man can ever get, borrowing money from me, drinking like a fish—and developing a hate for that woman that did my heart good. The awakening had been rude but thorough. He'd loved her—loved her as only a guy as simple and trusting as him could love.

During the divorce proceedings I think he almost believed that he *had* been cruel to her, and he was all broke up over it; but when she up and married Eddie Lonegan, then it was that the Kid

put on a don't-give-a-damn expression and hit the chute.

It was an inspiration that worked a reformation. My inspiration. I cornered him one day in Chris's place—a hangout for pugilistic and theatrical has-beens: the Kid with his boyish face already a bit seamed with the fast life. And I looped my arm through his and escorted him into a little booth.

"Kid," I says, "I take it that you're wise that Rose handed you a dirty deal—played you for a sucker all the way through."

His face got real ugly.

"Go ahead," he says tensely.

"And I guess you ain't any too stuck on her?"

"You got that right."

"I guess you wouldn't like nothing better than to even the score a bit?"

"Right again."

"Well, Kid, I got a plan!"

He broke into a cold sweat of hope and leaned across the table, staring at me.

"You—you—ain't stringin' me, Mr. Joe?"

"Nary a string. But it'll mean hard work, Kid—mighty hard work—and nerve."

"Mr. Joe—I'll do anything—anything in this world to get even with that woman. She did me, Mr. Joe; did me brown. And I was sucker enough to stand for it because I—I—loved her, and I thought she meant it when she said—Ah, hell, *you* understand!"

"I understand, Kid. Well, this is my plan. When you was in your prime you was a better man any day in the week than this cheesy Eddie Lonegan." His eyes glinted at mention of the name of Rose's husband.

"They do say, Kid, that there ain't no such thing as a comeback. I agree with 'em on general principles. But, Kid, rules is only proved by exceptions. I'm here to tell you, Kid, that if a fighter has the stuff, and if he has a motive that's strong enough—one of these here motives that just lift a guy by his sus-

penders and keep him everlasting at it—well, Kid, when a guy has *that* incentive, then he can do anything and then some."

"What I'm suggesting, Kid, is that you come back with me, let me finance a little training at Westchester: buck the apparatus for about six months straight, and then sling a challenge at Eddie. He'll snap you up if any promoter will offer a decent purse, because he thinks you're pie for him—him and Rose has probably laughed at you a dozen times—and I can tip off one or two promoters that you've got the stuff, the real stuff. They'll match you! How about it, Kid?"

The Kid shoves his glass of redeye off the table and it busts on the sawdust floor. Then he sticks his hand out and clasps mine.

"Until I beat Eddie Lonegan," he says, "I'm done with the booze. That's on the level!"

Of course, I knew the Kid never could win from Lonegan. No man's who's backslid that far ever can come back entirely. But I will hand it to him on the way he worked. In a month the blear had gone from his eyes, and the flabbiness of the muscles was giving way to the rocklike hardness which had been there before he ran foul of Rose La Belle. In two months he could do three miles on the road without exhausting himself. In four months he could do ten and come back to work out some more. In six months I was holding a rein on him to keep him from overtraining.

The only thing I experienced any real difficulty about was the weight question. A man takes on a heap of weight when he lays off, but at the end of seven months I had the Kid down to one hundred and thirty-four, and I knew that if he was matched up for a weigh-in six hours before the battle, I could steam out at least two pounds.

I tipped off a bunch of my newspaper friends—and having been in the game once myself, they fell for it—and pretty

soon the papers all over the country were screaming news of the attempted comeback of Kid Riley, ex-champion. And because I had talked confidentially a few places, there wasn't any ha-ha-ing over it.

Only Eddie Lonegan had his little giggle; and after I had taken Bob Edgren and Damon Runyon and Goldberg and a few other big experts up to see the Kid work out, and they had written their opinions to Promoter Carey—quiet and confidential like—he hung up a purse of ten thousand dollars for a ten-round go. And because the Kid was so wild for a chance, he agreed that Eddie Lonegan should take nine thousand, win, lose, or draw, while the Kid got the remaining thousand. And his training alone was due to cost that much.

Eddie accepted right off quick. It looked like chicken money to him—the easiest sort of easy coin. And two months later I saw the Kid, pink and white and with his eyes clear and his step springy, climb into the ring and receive instructions from Dan Smiley, the famous referee. And while I knew the Kid was due for a beating, I knew that he was gonna make Eddie understand that he was in a fight.

Knowing the motives behind this comeback stunt, I was prepared to see the Kid wade in and mix things from the gong. And I was never more surprised in my life than to see him, after they'd touched gloves, step back and throw up a long-range guard.

They sparred, they boxed, they danced in and out and landed light lefts and rights to face and body. The first round ended tamely. A half-dozen blows had landed on each man, but no punishment had been inflicted.

Somebody laughed. But I didn't. I knew that the Kid's hate had become a cold hate, doubly bitter—that it was cold enough to enable him to fight the right sort of a fight.

The second round was a repetition of the first, and the third of the second. Slowly and surely Eddie Lonegan was

piling up a lead on points, but despite his downward swoop and his booze-fighting months the Kid was as fresh as when he started the first round. That was his fight.

The fourth and fifth rounds passed uneventfully, and still the Kid retained his freshness. But his eyes were glittering, and he took my words of encouragement without so much as a look or word, except when he said, between the fifth and sixth rounds:

"I'm gonna win, Mr. Joe! I'm gonna win!"

In the sixth round Eddie changed his tactics. Seemingly the sparring of the first five rounds had gotten on his nerves, just as it had on the nerves of the crowd. He watched for his opening and waded in. The Kid clinched without attempting any infighting. Eddie came in once more, slugging like a pile-driver. And again the Kid clinched. The crowd hooted, but the Kid merely smiled slightly.

Similar tactics continued through the seventh round. It was Lonegan's fight by a tremendous majority, but I knew that the Kid hadn't uncorked yet.

In the eighth round he started things. Lonegan, falsely confident that the Kid was going to hang on until the end, came in uncovered. Biff! the Kid's right shot into the stomach, and Lonegan grunted. He backed away with a sudden terror, and the Kid was after him. Bang! Bing! Bang! A tattoo like a punching-bag rang out, first his right to Eddie's head, then his left and then his right again.

This time it was the champion who covered. Then the Kid ignored the howling of the crowd and played safe for the balance of the round.

In the ninth he took no chances until just the right opening presented itself, and then he slammed in a fusillade of blows to head and body, and once again the champion covered. At the end of the round the champion was breathing like a steam-engine, while the Kid seemed fresh as at the commencement.

It was the gong at the beginning of the tenth round which awakened the Kid. His jaw set and his eyes blazed and he streaked across the ring. And that was where I climbed up on my seat and howled. The spectators went wild. I have never seen such fighting! The blows were beyond count. At the end of a half-minute fighting Lonegan went down.

He took the count of eight and arose. The Kid, breathing stertorously and cursing gutturally, a changed man entirely, circled the restraining arm of the referee and piled all over his man; ignoring the puny blows he received, and driving home lefts and rights to the stomach and wind—always the body, never the head.

Lonegan broke ground. His face wore a hunted, harassed look. The Kid came in and the champion tried to clinch. The Kid's right streaked through his guard and landed on the solar plexus.

Dan Smiley counted ten over the prostrate form of Eddie Lonegan. And frenzied fanatics burst into the ring and lifted to their shoulders the recreated lightweight champion—Kid Riley.

And when it was all over and the Kid was dressed and had gone to the hotel with me to talk things over, I asked him a question.

"How did you have the nerve to play that waiting game, Kid?" I asked.

He smiled slowly.

"I didn't know Lonegan," he said softly, "but I knew Rosie. I know how she ruined me, and I knew no husband of hers could stand the gaff, 'cause why? 'Cause they've been drinkin' champagne bought with my money, ridin' until all hours of the night with my limousine. I wasn't fightin' Lonegan, Mister Joe; I was fightin' Rosie's husband. That's why I won. I knew what I was up against. I knew she'd filled him full of bull about what an easy mark I was. She made him neglect his trainin'—just like she done me!"

"I'm right happy, Mister Joe; right happy, to-night. And I've got one more thing to say:

"I've fought my last fight. I'm quittin' the ring. And why? Because, Mister Joe—there ain't nothin' that'll make Rosie sorer than to know I quit the game while I was lightweight champeen; that's why!"

"And the booze, Kid?"

He laughed shortly.

"Me an' booze is done, Mister Joe. I wonder," wistfully, "if we can't draw up some more guardianship papers, an' have you handle things for me once more?"



A HARP OF SILVER STRINGS

BY MAZIE V. CARUTHERS

MY heart was like a harp of many strings,
On which its master waked a strain divine—
Woven of love and lovers' whisperings,
A melody of twin souls—his and mine—
Vibrating softly at his slightest touch,
Until the great gods envied us too much,

And stilled his hand that made such music sweet!
Since when my harp is silent. All in vain
Would other minstrels love's same notes repeat;
'Twill not respond to human touch again.
Only for me o' nights it quavering sings
As though dead fingers swept its silver strings!

Heart to Heart Talks



By the Editor



WHISPER—another story by the creator of *Tarzan*—beginning next week!

And it's one that you have asked for many and many a time, at that.

If you read his thrilling, primitive story, "The Cave Girl," there is no need to remind you of it, even though it was published in the *All-Story* as long ago as July to September, 1913. For it told how the anemic, overcivilized, consumptive son of a blue-blooded Boston family was cast ashore on an unknown island in the southern seas and found himself among a colony of troglodytes, our cave-dwelling ancestors, who barely knew the use of fire, and did not know spears or even stone knives at all.

And among these surroundings the young man found his soul—and, incidentally, the Cave Girl, who was dressed in nothing in particular besides a pleasant smile, and who immediately made of him a hero. And, after many adventures when a ship finally came to rescue the young man, he elected to stay with his Cave Girl—and left the reader wanting to slay the author for making the story all too short, and yet wanting to pray to him to write some more.

Well, he did write some more, and now at last you have

THE CAVE MAN

Sequel to "The Cave Girl"

BY EDGAR RICE BURROUGHS

Author of "The Mucker," "Thuvia, Maid of Mars," "The Girl from Mars."

It will begin in this magazine next week, and will be complete in four issues.

The absolutely primitive, utter raw, crude savagery, seems to find an echo in the hearts of practically all of us, and there are very few who can withstand Mr. Burroughs's uncompromising return to Nature in its wildest and least civilized; and that he has lost none of his ability to take you there is amply proved by this fine story.

And, by the way, even if you didn't read "The Cave Girl," you needn't be afraid to start its sequel, for, in view of the three and a half years that have passed since the first story was published, we have supplied you with a complete synopsis of it to go with the following one.

So go right to it!



IF we were to announce a story for a certain number of this magazine by the author of the *Sherlock Holmes* or *Allan Quatermain* stories,

would you need any further inducement to buy that number? Right the first time.

Well, next week we're going to publish com-

plete a novelette by an author who is almost as well known even in the United States as Sir Arthur Conan Doyle or H. Rider Haggard. That is—

THAT AFFAIR AT THE SEMIRAMIS

BY A. E. W. MASON

Author of "The Four Feathers," "Witness for the Defense" (play), etc.

As a matter of fact, it is only through the exigencies of the war that we are in a position to offer you this splendid story at all; and if you ask what kind of a story it is, the answer would rather puzzle us. It's a detective story with a very able detective in it, and yet it isn't; it introduces some characters that you'll want most earnestly to meet some more, yet they are not at all usual characters—

Did you, by any chance, read "At the Villa Rose" any time in the past fifteen years? Because if so it is only necessary to state that the very same Mr. Ricardo, dilettante dabbler in criminology, and Hanau, brilliant French detective, who appeared in that fascinating story, herewith engage in the new and startling mystery in connection with the great Semiramis Hotel, London.

Maybe you'll guess at part of the solution of this inexplicable affair more quickly than an English reader would; but, just the same, you'll find that it holds ramifications that you couldn't possibly arrive at. Just see if it isn't so!



NEXT week, ladies and gentlemen, we shall have the pleasure of introducing to you an author whom we have just discovered—and an author who is most assuredly going to be heard from in the world of fiction.

Some writers are loved by their readers for their wealth of imagination and strength of plots and situations. Others are read for their keen wit and comfortable humor; and others—a very few—for their beauty of style alone. Occasionally you will find worth-while combinations of these good points; and one of those rare writers is Frederick Faust, whose maiden story in this magazine, "CONVALESCENCE," will be published next week.

For Mr. Faust has wedded a remarkable sense of the dramatic and gripping with a rarely smooth and charming style; and, better than that, his characters are folks that you'd just about give your eye teeth to meet in real life. I have visions of more than one wretched young man whose best girl after reading a Frederick Faust story (oh, yes, there'll be more) will turn from him disappointed and disillusioned, de-

manding, "Oh, John, why can't *you* make love like the hero does in this story?"

By the same token, it would be an excellent plan for the gentlemen themselves to read and get pointers; and there's no time like the first opportunity!



"MATRIMONIAL BONDS," by John D. Swain—

Of course, you don't have to be reminded of Mr. Swain. "Battle Royal," "Old Home Week," "Queen of the Mosquitoes," "The Crewell Emeralds"—the list of his stories is a long one, and no two are in the very least alike.

Furthermore this, the latest fruit of his ingenious, indelible pencil (yes, he scorns a typewriter) is as unlike the rest of his stories as usual; is more cynically witty, and is altogether one of the most startling conceptions you have ever seen in the pages of this magazine. You will certainly be horrified beyond measure when you start to read it, but you certainly won't stop till you have finished it; and that, after all, is the supreme test of a good story.



REMEMBER a striking and most unusual little story that we printed last September about a red-haired little vaudeville actress and the ruler of a South Sea island near Hawaii—"The Taboo and King Candy"? You sure do, if you read it. Well, its author, Herman Howard Matteson, is most assuredly making good the promise that story conveyed. It was his first.

To prove it, read next week "CROWS-NEST—BLACK FEATHERS," by Mr. Matteson. It is a story of the fish pirates of Puget Sound, and it has life and color that no author could possibly give to a yarn without absolute knowledge. And you may judge of how thoroughgoing Mr. Matteson is when I say that—

But no. That belongs to another story. Just wait and you'll hear more from this young man!



HAS MISSED SEVERAL TREATS

TO THE EDITOR:

Perhaps you will remember that about a year or two ago you received a letter from a very good friend of the *Cavalier* concerning the stories of your magazine. I objected to the new stories you were printing; they were not half so good as the stories of old.

I had been a constant reader of your book for some time. Not long after I wrote that letter I quit buying your magazine. At that time I was living in Winchester, Kentucky. Last week I was walking along Main Street, and noticing some ALL-STORY magazines in a window, I

bought one. You or any one else that reads the ALL-STORY WEEKLY will know why, after reading one, I have decided to continue to do so.

"The Argus Pheasant" and "The Holy Scare" are something like the stories that were printed in the *Cavalier*. They are great.

In the Heart to Heart Talks was a letter congratulating you on "Tarzan and the Jewels of Opar." I was not reading your book at the time, therefore I missed a great treat. I will never miss another. I have read all the other *Tarzan* tales, and I will not pass up this one, because they stand among the greatest stories ever published in your magazine; but I do not know in how many parts the tale was published, so I will be very thankful if you will kindly inform me, through the Heart to Heart Talks, that I may send you money for the books.

I shall never forget "To the Victor," "The Outlaw," "Texas Rangers," the *Tarzan* tales, "The Sea Demons," and "Sweetheart Primeval." Stories of that kind are unforgettable. In my opinion, your book is the best one going.

VANLEY GRIMES.

410 South High Street,
Akron, Ohio.

NOTE: "Tarzan and the Jewels of Opar" was published in the ALL-STORY WEEKLY, November 18 to December 16, 1916. We can furnish the five numbers containing it for twenty cents each.

SURE CURE FOR BLUES

TO THE EDITOR:

I have been reading the ALL-STORY WEEKLY for about seven years, and at that time still called the *Cavalier*. I enjoyed every one of the stories you ever printed, and your ALL-STORY is my steady companion. The weeks do not pass quickly enough for me so I can buy a new number. I am a young traveling man, and only left my home in Cincinnati about two weeks ago, and I always get the blues the first two weeks out. To-day is Sunday, and I kept my sample trunk company all day and thought of the good times we had while in Cincinnati. My dear editor, it was enough to make anybody feel blue. But then I took the ALL-STORY, and the first story I struck was "Just to Prove It," by Gerald Mygatt. After a while I got interested, and laughed so heartily over it that the blues vanished. You call the story a joke. Well, it is a scream. Let him come back. Gerald is rich, and I thank him for taking the blues away. I wrote these few lines to show my appreciation for the ALL-STORY, as it deserves praise, and I always will remain a reader.

I expect to leave for Europe in June to make my home in Paris, France. But before sailing I

will stop at your office and leave my subscription to be sent me there.

Wishing you and the ALL-STORY continued success,

JOHN WM. NOCKELS.

Hotel Alms.
Cincinnati, Ohio.

FAVORITE AUTHOR? ALL OF THEM

TO THE EDITOR:

Find enclosed four dollars for one more year's subscription to the best of all magazines. I commenced taking it the fifth of February last, and I would hate to give it up now.

My favorite authors are—well, all of them, although "The Border Legion" and the *Tarzan* stories made the greatest impression on my mind, as I cannot forget them as I do others. The Northwest stories are simply great, and then some. I have watched a whole year for some one from this county or town in the Heart to Heart Talks, but never have seen one name from here. Still I know of a few that take the ALL-STORY WEEKLY.

Yours for one more year of good reading. I can go without my dinner, but not my ALL-STORY WEEKLY.

CORA KINNER.

R. F. D. 3,
Bath, New York.

"THOSE WHO WALK IN DARKNESS"

TO THE EDITOR:

Could you furnish me with all copies of the ALL-STORY WEEKLY containing E. R. Burroughs's *Tarzan* stories and Perley Poore Sheehan's story, "Those Who Walk In Darkness"? If so, how many books are there, and what price will they be?

Wishing success to the ALL-STORY WEEKLY,
MRS. M. S. F.
Huntington, Indiana.

NOTE: "Those Who Walk In Darkness," by Perley Poore Sheehan, was published in the ALL-STORY WEEKLY, June 10, 1916. We can furnish the number containing it for twenty cents.

The first four of the *Tarzan* stories—"Tarzan of the Apes," "The Return of Tarzan," "The Beasts of Tarzan," and "The Son of Tarzan"—have been published in book form by A. C. McClurg & Co., Chicago. The price of each is \$1.30 net. The last of the stories (to date), "Tarzan and the Jewels of Opar," was published in the ALL-STORY WEEKLY, November 18 to December 16, 1916, and we can supply the

five numbers containing it for twenty cents each.

LIKES THE ENGLISH AUTHORS

TO THE EDITOR:

Since writing you last spring I have read and enjoyed many fine stories in the ALL-STORY WEEKLY. In fact, they are all good, with the exception of three about which I did not care.

I think the two best ones were "The Yellow Furlough" and "Nuala O'Malley." These were grand. All the rest were very good indeed.

"When the Devil Was Sick," "The Short Cut," "Contraband," "The Matrimaniac," and "At the Stroke of Twelve" are all worthy of special mention.

The two stories by the English authors were very good, too—"The Pit-Diggers" and "The Black Cloud."

Hope you will give us another serial by A. D. Pettibone, author of "The Yellow Furlough," also Randall Parrish. They are too good for you to lose.

Keep them coming from Burroughs, Bedford-Jones, England, Gregory, Rath, Franklin, and Mildred Van Inwegen, and last but not least, Zane Grey.

W. B. BELCHES.

Winterport, Maine.

A SOLDIER'S OPINION

TO THE EDITOR:

I have been a reader of the ALL-STORY WEEKLY for a little over a year. I bought it at the news-stands until I came down into Mexico after Villa and his bandits. Its arrival was so uncertain that I at once subscribed for it yearly, and I have spent more than one lonely hour with my ALL-STORY.

I never do read the short stories, for they are so short that they end before I can get interested in them. But I never miss a serial story. The two now being published, "Nuala O'Malley" and "Greywold," are the best ever written. I have not started to read "The Scarlet Ghost" or "The Holy Scare," but I feel sure that they will be as good as any, if not better.

I just felt that I wanted to express my appreciation of your publication. Keep on with the serial stories and I shall be grateful for your kindness.

I will now close, remaining forever

A reader of the ALL-STORY,

WAGONER EDWARD J. SMITH,
7th Cavalry, Supply Troop,
Columbus, New Mexico.

LETTERETTES

I have just finished reading "Two Fares Back Home," by Mr. Sorrells, and enjoyed it very much indeed. It is well worded, and keeps up a keen interest to the very last. The thoroughly unexpected ending adds much charm to the story.

I trust I may see more stories from the same author's pen in your magazines in the near future.

MISS MARY MURPHY.

Languages, Humboldt High School,
Humboldt, Tennessee.

We have been taking the ALL-STORY for over a year. Some stories! I am in love with E. J. Rath, author of "When the Devil Was Sick" and "Too Much Efficiency." She sure is there on the sensible stuff; but I am married, and can only fight with my husband to get to read the ALL-STORY first. We are always ready with our dime on Thursday for the best book to be had.

Give us a sequel to "The Brass Check."

MRS. ANNETTE KING.

Huntsville, Alabama.

Am glad to say I am well pleased with my ALL-STORY. I do enjoy the negro stories by E. K. Means, also *Roxey Malone* stories. Keep it just as it is; I have no kick to make; it suits me fine. I wish it success, and may the editor live long and give his readers plenty of enjoyment from the stories he gives us.

MABEL WALL.

2118 Mermaid Avenue,
Coney Island, New York.

Keep on with serials like "On a Stallion Shod With Fire" and "The Girl From Farris's." Those are the kind that do the most good.

MRS. VIOLA HANNA.

Lanham, Maryland.

I want you to know that I think your interest will exceed your principal at the big cash-in, for your magazine has spread a great, wide path of sunshine around this old world.

JEAN ALLEN.

743 Locust Avenue,
Long Beach, California.

I have been buying the ALL-STORY for five or six years. I also take other magazines, but the ALL-STORY beats them all, for it is the best magazine I have ever read.

I like E. R. Burroughs, G. P. Serviss, Zane Grey, H. B. Jones, and Allen French, and some few others best; but I really like them all.

THOMAS BEAN.

Lake City, Arkansas.

TO THOSE WHO LOVE THEIR LAND

—whose pulses stir at the sight of the flag aloft; whose hearts beat in time with the martial traditions of the nation's history—there is that rare thing, a patriotic thrill, in

What He Could Do



by
Kensett Rossiter

Only a little story, but one bearing a ringing message. It is in the APRIL

ARGOSY

along with eight other short stories: "The Doones of Badgworthy," H. B. Marriott Watson; "A Ranch Secret," Seward W. Hopkins; "The Golden Goal of Spring," Leslie Davis; "Trimmed," A. E. Ullman; "What She Had to Say," Keene Thompson; "Sixty-Sixty," George C. Jenkins; "His Yellow Streak," Ben Duncan; "Their Reel Risk," Neil Moran. Three serials: "Playing the Man," J. I. Lawrence; "Daring the Danger Zone," Norcross Forbes; "The Gilded Trap," G. M. A. Cain; and

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